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Nothing Short of Complete Liberation: The Burroughsian Ideal of Space as Curatorial Strategy in Audial Art

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Abstract:

Nothing Short of Complete Liberation: The Burroughsian Ideal of Space as Curatorial Strategy in Audial Art

Mark Jackson, 2014

This research contributes to an understanding of curatorial strategy and sound art practices by using an inferential approach to curating. The study uses analysis of the theories and tape experiments of William S. Burroughs (1914-1997) to explore curatorial problems occurring within sound-related gallery displays of contemporary art. The study presents a Burroughsian methodology of curatorial practice engaging in “games with space and time” (Mottram 1977) in a manner suggestive of a complex form of mediation between aspects of the “meaning-making process” (Drabble in Graham 2010) relevant to the presentation of an exhibition of sound art.

The study examines Burroughs’ project in the ‘60s and early ‘70s in the theoretical framework of curatorial strategy in sound-oriented practices to articulate a domain of meaning-making focused on visitor interactions. By considering interaction with sound as an unstable and unclear process, and privileging the exhibition visitor as the focus of the process of meaning-making in exhibitions, this study presents an ecological approach to curating, advancing studies in ecological approaches to meaning (Clarke 2005 and Gibson 1979), definitions of meaning in relation to Konstantīns Raudive’s experiments with Electronic Voice Phenomena (Raudive 1971 and Banks 2012) and Burroughs’ revision of L Ron Hubbard’s Dianetics (Hubbard 1950). This study advances practical studies in curatorial theory and Burroughs scholarship, with particular regard to how meaning-making processes might be conceptualised in sound-based artistic domains. To this end it includes the practical example of a sound art exhibition *Dead Fingers Talk: The Tape Experiments of William S. Burroughs* at IMT Gallery, London, in 2010.

Through analysis of Burroughs’ project and how it absorbed his understanding of Cubism, Alfred Korzybski (1879-1950), and Hubbard, his collaborations with Brion Gysin (1916-1986) and his application of experimental techniques, the study articulates a Burroughsian space as a motivation for experimental curatorial practice.

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For Sebastian.

Contents

0 Introduction	1
0.1 Burroughs	3
0.2 Thesis Outline	5
0.3 Curator-as-Practitioner	7
0.4 <i>Audial Art</i>	14
1. Contextualising Sounds and Hearing as Unclear and Unstable	24
1.1 Subjective Listening	28
1.2 Sound and Cognition – <i>niche</i> and <i>domain</i>	33
1.3 Sound and Cognition – <i>affordance</i>	36
1.4 Sound and Technology	41
1.5 Conclusion	49
2 William S. Burroughs and Meaning-Making	52
2.0 Introduction	52
2.1 Burroughs and Meaning-Making	52
2.2 Burroughs on Korzybski	54
2.3 Gysin, Cubism and the Cut-Ups	63
2.4 “nothing is true, everything is permitted” – from Space-Binding to Space	73
2.5 Burroughsian Space	75
2.5.1 Space in Burroughs’ Literature	76
2.5.2 Some Other Manifestations of Burroughsian Space	82
2.6 Conclusion	90
3 The Tape Experiments: Sound in Burroughs’ Thought and Work	91
3.0 Introduction	91
3.0.1 Burroughs’ Resonance in Music	91

3.1 Burroughs' Voice and the <i>Routine</i>	95
3.1.1 Burroughs' Voice	98
3.2 The Tape Experiments	102
3.2.1 The Tapes	105
3.2.2 'Handkerchief Masks, News Cut-ups'	107
3.2.3 'Working with the Popular Forces'	117
3.2.3.1 Intro	117
3.2.3.2 News/Schultz	117
3.2.3.3 Noise	120
3.2.4 'Her Primrose Laundry'	123
3.2.5 'WSB and IS. Stereo Experiment'	130
3.3 Dianetics and Scientology	137
3.3.1 The E-Meter	142
3.4 Burroughs' Recordings as Not-Artworks	147
3.5 Outside East St. Louis in the dominion of aging roots, ten-year-old keeping watch – Cracked pool hall and vaudeville voices made this dream – distant coffin between the mirrors of time that meanwhile i had forgotten	155
3.6 Conclusion "The Recording is Incomplete and Cuts Off Abruptly"	158
 4 The Tape Experiments of William S. Burroughs at IMT Gallery	162
4.0 Introduction	162
4.1 Basic Concerns in Establishing a Curatorial Strategy for the Exhibition	163
4.2 Recent Exhibitions of Burroughs' Work	166
4.2.1 Curating Burroughs: Fallows and Genzmer at Kunsthalle Wien	167
4.2.2 Curating Burroughs: Breger, Heil and Weibel at ZKM	168
4.2.3 Curating Burroughs: Rondinone at the Palais de Tokyo	168
4.2.4 Hirst and Lucas as Examples of Engagement with the Burroughs Myth	172
4.3 Dead Fingers Talk	176
4.3.1 Artists and Autonomy	178

4.3.2 The “Recording”	181
4.3.3 A Note Regarding Participants	182
4.3.4 The Recordings	183
4.3.5 The Exhibition	190
4.3.5.1 <i>First Thought Best Thought</i>	198
4.4 Conclusion	199
5 Conclusion	201
Bibliography	206

0 Introduction

Curating contemporary art has become an open field for alternative methodologies. As the nature of art exhibitions and sites of engagement with art has expanded, artists, gallerists, critics and academics have opened up curating to different approaches in response to different needs. The role of the curator has shifted from caring for collections to becoming a key figure in the presentation of works, sometimes to the extent of being considered the author of artistic propositions.

The discourse surrounding curating has also expanded and continues to evolve in response to new ways in which artists and curators are approaching the placement and contextualisation of works. As curators take on different projects and approach curating from different backgrounds, the methodologies of curating are welcoming less formal, more experimental approaches that have profound effects on the nature of the work presented.

The articulation and analysis of curatorial strategies matters to artists, visitors and others involved in contemporary culture because it provides insights into processes by which art is brought into view. For the processes involved in the engagement with art to be properly considered, it is important to closely examine the context, design and presentation of exhibition making. Exhibitions provide a framework for artistic presentation and as such have a direct effect on how we engage with art. The specific strategies curators develop towards the aims of individual projects are therefore of increasing relevance to the discussion of art, meaning and environments of engagement.

The often complex or evasive language of art press releases, catalogues and information sheets can easily complicate or conceal the role of the curator in the presentation. Whilst such language can help keep the interpretation of work open to analysis and encourage intellectual as well as sensorial engagement, it can make the activities, motivations and objectives of the curator unclear. By contrast this thesis presents a candid approach to the development of a curatorial strategy.

In comparison to conversations on curating visual art, the histories of curating art that involves or prioritises sound is relatively slim. The designation *contemporary art* is commonly associated with the history of the visual arts. Towards the end of the 20th Century and in the beginning of the 21st, sound has been making itself more and more present in the visual art landscape. In 2010 the Turner Prize dropped the word “visual” from its “visual art prize” for the first time and announced that the sound artist Susan

Philipsz would be part of the short list. Philipsz would go on to win the prize, a major indication that sound was being recognised by the UK art establishment as an important presence in contemporary art.

The curatorial strategy presented in my thesis is one that prioritises sound as a medium for contemporary exhibition projects and as such makes an important contribution to this field of research.

This thesis aims to articulate a curatorial strategy that is coherent both for artists and curators involved in the complex interplay of media found in contemporary practices. It does so through the work ideas and experiments of 20th Century author William S. Burroughs, which provides versatile resources from which to construct such a strategy.

This thesis is the culmination of research inspired by my practice as a curator of art and my interest in the treatment of sound in the visual arts. As a factor of my interest in sound I was drawn to Burroughs' activities in the 1960s and early '70s, a period that coincided with his sustained interest in experimental sound projects. In my research I became interested in notions of space that appear and develop in his literature during this period. His ideas of space, or the notion of a Burroughsian space, seem important to Burroughs in terms of creative activity and so will, in this thesis, become a prime focus of investigation.

Burroughs' work is generally regarded as a body radical, counter-cultural literature, however his expanded production has included experimental film, performance, sound experiments, painting, collage and sculpture. Additionally Burroughs is a significant example of an artist whose interests shifted between media, the results of each informing the other. This range of media, and the feedback between media, is one example of the versatility of Burroughs as a source for curatorial strategy. Burroughs' practice also employed elements of found objects and collage in a manner relevant to curating as an activity of collections and arrangement. Burroughs' use of found objects, sounds and images feeds into the language of curating in interesting ways. Thus Burroughs is an effective focus for discussions of curatorial strategy and methodology. This utility is reinforced through the advantage of considerable first hand documentation of his ideas and their development through books, letters, notes and audiovisual experiments.

In addition to his versatility, Burroughs is a relevant source for research as he has become an influential figure for many creative artists and yet, outside of the domain of

literature, his work remains on the fringes of contemporary arts criticism. It is apparent from recent publications and exhibitions that this inconsistency is in the process of being addressed, and this thesis forms part of that process.

0.1 Burroughs

Although details of Burroughs' biography are well known, it is important to reiterate a brief biography here to give some more relevant details emphasis.

Burroughs was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1914. He attended Harvard from 1932 where he is said to have enjoyed courses on Chaucer, Shakespeare and Coleridge. Via the latter, according to Ted Morgan, he was taught that there existed associations between drug-taking and creativity (Morgan 1991:57-58) an association that would become a significant part of his public notoriety.¹

Upon his graduation from Harvard in 1936 Burroughs began to receive a monthly allowance from his parents of \$200 (Morgan 1991: 65), a far from insignificant sum equivalent to at least \$3000 today. This support would grant him an autonomy that allowed him to travel and live as an artist in relative comfort, albeit with his finances depleted by significant dependence on opiates and regular marijuana and alcohol use. It is worth noting this significant financial support, as it would give him the resources to be able to pursue a more autonomous, experimental lifestyle.

A key moment in his life appears to have been instigated by Burroughs killing his partner Joan Vollmer in 1951 in an incident involving a gun and a "William Tell" trick that, according to Ted Marak, he'd taught himself on a farm he'd bought in Texas (see Johnson 2006:155). According to Burroughs, this act drove him to pursue his writing career with more vigour (Burroughs 1985:18) and instigated a long exile from the American continent, living in Tangier, Paris and London before returning to the US in the mid-'70s.

In the mid '50s in Tangier Burroughs worked on a manuscript that would become *Naked Lunch* (Burroughs 1959). This book was to have an important impact on countercultural literature and the censorship of literature in the United States, and caused Burroughs to become best known as a writer associated with a group of American post-

¹ When, in 1960, Peter Forbes of the British newspaper *The Sunday People* introduced the "Beatnik horror" to its readers, he did so giving Burroughs the rather generous distinction of being an "Ex-Drug Addict" (Forbes 1960). According to Grauerholz, Burroughs would in fact remain a drug addict for the remainder of his life (interview tapes recorded by Roger Clarke held in his private collection).

World War II writers, poets and artists popularly referred to as the Beat Generation (for the influence of the Beat Generation see Lawlor 2005, Caveney 1997, Schneiderman 2004, Charters 2001 and Phillips 1996).

Naked Lunch also was a key step in Burroughs' development of a non-linear style of writing that would, from 1959, evolve into techniques of cutting and pasting text in new permutations. This new approach to writing was inspired by a chance discovery by artist Brion Gysin, who was staying at the same Paris hotel at the time (for thorough depictions of this period see Morgan 1991 and Miles 2000).

Gysin would also suggest the tape recorder to Burroughs as a potential tool of creative insight and Burroughs would use the tape recorder for numerous esoteric purposes beyond Gysin's original intentions. Such activities included using tape recorders as a means of conjuring a curse upon a person or organisation, resistance to control and as a tool of cognitive adjustment (see, for example, Burroughs 1970, Odier 1970 and Baker 2010:157).

Looking to address his opiate addictions, Burroughs travelled to London to undertake what he regarded as a revolutionary cure, and he stayed in London until 1974 when he returned to the United States. It was in this period, from the early '60s to the mid '70s, that Burroughs was most active in experimenting with sound (occasionally with the collaboration of young Cambridge mathematics graduate Ian Sommerville (circa 1940-1976) and burgeoning film director Antony Balch (1937-1980)).

From around the time of his move to London Burroughs' interest in experimenting with sound appeared to be at its height. It was also the time in which Burroughs' was beginning to see a correlation between tape machines and cognition. Therefore the period from the early '60s to the mid '70s will be the period on which I shall focus with regards to Burroughs work and ideas. Burroughs' interest in sound would become a less significant component of his production and philosophy in the late '70s. Upon his return to the United States in 1974, and the adoption of James Grauerholz (1953-) as his editor, Burroughs' activities became more focused on a professional career as a writer.

From the period on which I will focus, Burroughs' would consistently introduce and develop ideas of space, whether using space literally or as an image or metaphor. This recurring use of space, occasionally with ambiguous connotations, appears significant in terms of Burroughs' formulation of creative action.

0.2 Thesis Outline

Early on in my research it became evident that Burroughs' discourse surrounding space appeared to be centred on a potential or ideal state. It became clear that he regarded this state as a goal brought about by activities that he was either proposing or undertaking in his writing and experimentation. I became interested in the notion of pursuing Burroughs' ideal, which I will be referring to as Burroughsian Space, through practical means. Following this lead I began formulating an exhibition that would stand as a practical engagement with the themes and insights that I was beginning to uncover, in essence putting together a project that responded to concepts of Burroughsian Space as they might be realised in 21st Century artistic practices.

This thesis then is an account of that process. In the chapters that follow I contextualise my own activities as a curator, and my approach to the use and presentation of sound in, what is traditionally described as, the visual art context of the art gallery. I examine Burroughs' ideas about sound and about creative practice, and closely analyse four of his most suggestive experiments with sound. Through this work I undertake a curatorial methodology for addressing sound, and present, within this thesis, a curatorial strategy for the exhibition.

Chapter One presents my articulation of the role of the curator in the context of curatorial strategy and sound-oriented arts practices. I am often meticulous in the clarification of both terminology and context for the reason that it is context that is central to curatorial activity and therefore integral to my candid approach to the subject. I describe the interactions of sound with curatorial methodology from a unique perspective, resisting definition of fields of practice to present *audial art* as a way to articulate sound in the gallery context. I consider curatorial activity in an ecological context and as an interaction with meaning-making processes. The specific context of the terms presented in this thesis is important with respect to how they might be of practical benefit to the reader, particularly in anticipation of Chapters Two and Three in which I introduce complex relationships in artistic production articulated or implied by Burroughs. I shall first briefly describe the emphases inherent in how this thesis will deal with the notion of *curator* with regards to what this term might mean in an art gallery context. I shall then go on to describe what I mean in this thesis when I talk about *sound* and, from this, *audial art*, a technical term that is to stand as a curatorial articulation of artists' engagements with sound.

Chapter Two and Three present a theme for the curatorial strategy and through which the curatorial strategy unfolds. In this case the theme focuses first on Burroughs' approach to meaning and meaning-making. Following this, in Chapter Three, I concentrate on his interest in sound, moving from ideas of voice and physicality in Burroughs to his tape experiments from the '60s and 70s.

The nature of Burroughs' work during the time period with which this research is concerned appears to have, as I shall demonstrate in Chapters Two and Three, a strong sound-oriented emphasis. In Chapters Two and Three I show how this work might be contextualised and expanded in response to writing by Burroughs and his critics. This will present Burroughs in terms of the contextualisation of sound and audial art that I have undertaken in Chapter One. Following this I shall then detail the curatorial process and the resultant exhibition, demonstrating the validity of the project in terms of it being an actualisation of an art gallery response to key activities with sound undertaken by Burroughs. The emphasis of the exhibition is to be on materials that are sonic or otherwise have some credible relationship to sound. The exhibition, the curatorial strategy and, indeed, the project as a whole is concerned with an exhibition context that considers sound as a main concern in terms of being either a vehicle or a theme for artistic production.

The exhibition was proposed to the artists involved as a question, asking each of them to supply a recording in response to the tape experiments of William S. Burroughs. I asked a variety of artists to respond: sculptors, installation artists, sound artists, filmmakers, musicians and curators among them, in order to aim at a cross-section of works that might reveal contemporary attitudes to Burroughs' ideas and activities, and to what constitutes a "recording" in the context of a sound-oriented exhibition at a contemporary art gallery. The resultant exhibition presented a compelling argument for the re-evaluation of Burroughs' creative objectives in terms of contemporary practices that deal with sound and this thesis is a presentation of this argument.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I present the exhibition itself undertaken as a practical, public realisation of the curatorial strategy. In this chapter I reveal insights from its presentation and surrounding activities. I describe and document the exhibition in detail, recording important insights and noting where the project veers away from more common or traditional understanding of terms or practices, using the material presented to direct the reader to the curatorial strategy. I shall be doing so by employing research I have conducted on Burroughs' writing and tape experiments but also by bringing to the

thesis research beyond Burroughs in order to resolve instances arising in my articulation of a curatorial strategy for which Burroughs might be considered unclear or otherwise problematic. The majority of these additional sources will be introduced in Chapter One. This thesis will then stand as a strategy of curatorial practice drawn primarily from Burroughs and developed in response to a major public project.

Such a candid and rigorous presentation of curatorial strategy is aimed at helping to expose ways of working and thinking about sound in the arts and about contemporary art projects in general. It is intended to reveal a curatorial methodology and the development of curatorial strategies as processes closely linked to the activities of both artists and visitors. The narrow focus of the curatorial strategy is intended to demonstrate a high level of criticality possible both in sound-oriented practices and in the sound-based activities of Burroughs. However such a focus will be of use to the wider ongoing project of interrogating the process of exhibition making and its effect on our engagement with art and artists.

Prior to considering what Burroughsian Space might be, there are various terms that are important to define with regards to this project, particularly those related to sound itself and its use in arts practice. The precision of defining these terms is necessary to provide the context through which I am approaching Burroughs' production, a production that is considerably complex and cluttered both in its experimentalism and in its archival status. I shall therefore take this introduction and the opening chapter that follows it to define certain primary terms to give what comes after a satisfactory critical context.

0.3 Curator-as-Practitioner

The first term to contextualise is that of the curator in terms of my own approach to curatorial activities and how that might therefore have an impact on both the exhibition itself and on the context for the curatorial strategy.

The role of curator and the job of curating that I myself undertake on a professional level developed from my educational background in Fine Art as opposed to Art History. This is not the most common route for curators of formal arts organisations as any cursory review of educational requirements in the job marketplace will note that "Art History or equivalent" is the standard degree qualification suggested. In recent years curating qualifications have arisen that fill the hypothetical gaps between art practitioners

as curators and art historians as curators, however this has still to properly establish itself as the typical avenue to curating. Beyond the traditional conventions of the job market there are many practising artists who would cite curator in addition to their artistic practice and therefore his thesis might also be considered as being relevant to them. This is not to say that a curatorial practice that develops from art practice research rather than art historical research should be considered in anyway as the preferable model in the personal development of the curator, it is merely the contextual background for the curation of the exhibition in this thesis and is an important context to consider in relation to themes that shall arise later.² This thesis therefore may be of particular relevance to curatorial practice that derives from artistic practice, but also this knowledge might help to explain how in devising the exhibition and curatorial strategy presented in Chapter Four I so easily disregard historical contextualisation of some of the materials.³

The consequence of a practice-based origin of curatorial activity as opposed to a history-based origin is that the goals and values of a proposed project might be considered to have different emphases. At the time of writing my role as curator is almost universally based in contemporary art galleries or equivalent organisations and spaces, not in museums. In this manner the emphasis is on presenting or reacting to current interests or trends rather than historical narratives. Again, it is not the responsibility of this thesis to argue for hierarchy in regards to these emphases, and I should make it clear that I do not consider these activities as mutually exclusive, but to demonstrate a strategy more relevant to the former. Current trends and historical narratives do, after all, frequently have a way of interacting with each other.

This emphasis responds to the relatively recent emergence of new curatorial behaviours: the artist-as-curator and the curator-as-artist. Traditionally the role of a curator required the researching, acquiring, maintaining of a collection of materials and presenting and contextualising them to their audience. In this manner it has not changed, however the ways and means of fulfilling these roles has shifted dramatically over the last century and exponentially continues to do so. O'Neill acknowledges in *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* that:

² I also acknowledge that the simplicity of a divide between the two approaches is complexified by arts administrators as curators, gallery managers and directors as curators, events programmers as curators, musical conductors as curators and so on.

³ Although, as I shall make clear, this is in accordance with the subject of the exhibition as much as it may or may not be a symptom of this type of curatorial practice.

During the last twenty-five years [...] the figure of the curator has moved from being a caretaker of collections [and] curatorship has begun to be understood as a constellation of creative activities, akin to artistic praxis.

O'Neill 2012:1

He goes on to describe how the exhibition has become both medium and form for creative practitioners (the curator-as-artist), as well as how curatorial practices have been used by artists to contextualise their own artistic projects (artist-as-curator). Although both approaches could in some way be deemed relevant to my own project, it is the former within which I would situate this thesis, the curator-as-artist, in the sense that I define my position to this exhibition as a curator whilst using the exhibition as a means to develop artistic concerns. At the same time I find the *artist* qualification of O'Neill's curator-as-artist problematic and so will be using the term curator-as-practitioner. An emphasis of methodology and context will help make clearer the motivation and rationale behind decisions made in terms of my description of curating, of sound in the arts, and in terms of the exhibition presented in Chapter Three.

In practice the curator is a role in arts and museum management that affords different assumptions of activity in different social and institutional contexts. There are many categories and approaches to curating as a career, and it is an activity that requires constant adaptation to the specificities of individual projects: "in curating there is a need for flexible strategies. Every show is a unique situation [...]" (Obrist 2008:17). As such, in terms of developing the curatorial strategy in this thesis, one of the reasons for requiring a general definition of the practice of curating is that approaches to curating differ dependant upon the avenue by which a curator has become a curator, but also upon the context or environment in which this curator is active. This is more the case today than in the short history of the curator of contemporary art due to the expanding field of contexts and environments in which arts projects are delivered.

It could be argued that it is not the definition of *curator* that has changed, but the definition of *collection* and how that collection is organised or selected. The rise of the independent or freelance curator (see Graham 2010:151-153) has allowed the existence of curators without a collection, or rather a collection that is hypothetical, virtual, transitory or pending. The appearance of curators within the retail sector of contemporary art: the commercial gallery or art fair; and of curators of performative, musical and web-based propositions has widened the specialities of curatorial practices and the nature of those who undertake them.

The term *curator* has also moved, via its contemporary art adoption, into other industries such as interior design and music, and there are curators in the fine art industry that I have come across who are uncomfortable with the idea of being thought of as a curator, instead replacing the title for, what they regard as, less problematic alternatives such as *exhibition organiser*, *cultural practitioner* or *exhibition maker*, or others who are happy to be called curators yet prefer to avoid the use of the verb *to curate*. Hans Ulrich Obrist's review of curatorial activity is no more defined. His *A Brief History of Curating* presents the "history" of the title as a series of dialogues, an "oral history" (Obrist 2008:197) of suggestions of those who he regards as the pioneers of current curatorial traditions, rather than a strict plotted history of a profession. Obrist's approach presents a network of different curatorial practices, each dependant on different structures and histories of their own, and demonstrates an extraordinary diversity of curatorial practice even in Obrist's relatively small sample of individuals. Obrist's interviews also reveal how curators see institutional spaces as problematic in relation to artists and artistic production and prefer to consider exhibition space on the terms of a platform (Obrist 2008:26) or laboratory (Obrist 2008:30) rather than an institution or museum. O'Neill's approach is more rigorous in his delineation of the narrative of the curator from "caretaker" through to an artistic approach to an exhibition as: "an attempt at converting subjective value and personal choice into social and cultural capital through the arrangement of the primary material that is art." (O'Neill 2012:86-88). O'Neill could be also describing Obrist's *Brief History* itself. However, in his more rigorous dissection of curatorial practices, O'Neill likewise recognises how curators are now "able to take for granted their being a site of diversity, contradiction, and conflict." (Ibid. 122)

Such liberal approaches are perhaps the only ones that can be realistically expected of a field whose responsibilities are so various, and whose concerns are inconsistent. In addition to the desire to curate exhibitions, the proliferation of small and artist-led galleries and unconventional sites of exhibition production may require the curator to undertake a number of activities traditionally reserved for distinct roles in larger institutions, or indeed require other individuals to occupy the role of the curator. In contemporary art, the curator can be seen as a fluid position related to an exhibition proposition, both universally but also in response to the individual demands of that which is being curated. Despite this there are particular emphases I shall acknowledge in terms of my own relationship towards curatorial practice, as this acknowledgement shall

help give a better understanding of important aspects of the methodology surrounding the curatorial strategy that I am presenting.

The presence of the contemporary art gallery as the location from which this thesis' curatorial strategy is articulated has an important impact on how one might perceive of the presence of the curator in an exhibition proposition. If one accepts the view that "exhibitions have become *the* medium through which most art becomes known. [They] are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art" (Greenberg et al. 1996:2) whilst also accepting Drabble's assertion that "the exhibition has become a meta-layer in [the] meaning making process [of art]" (Drabble in Graham 2010:153), then curators are part of the meaning-making process at the primary site of exchange of artistic production, and as such curatorial strategy is directly entwined with mainstream artistic activity both in terms of how its audience develops a relationship with the work and in terms of its documentation and critique. It is crucial to acknowledge the artistic influence of a curator on the meaning-making process and on how such influence must contribute to debates surrounding perceived autonomy of artistic production, regardless of a curator's intentions to remain invisible in the presentation of contemporary art.⁴

In the case of this project the role of the curator is to originate, define and publicly deliver an exhibition. In some case the curator might be employed in only one of these three activities, or even in subsections of them, however in the case of the project presented in this thesis the curatorial responsibilities were inclusive of all of these roles. Processes relevant to my curatorial strategy, and how they relate to Burroughs' work, will be detailed in Chapter Four.

If the curator and the exhibition both have an emphasis on curating-as-practice, or creative curating as it has been described elsewhere in an academic context,⁵ then it is important to be clear in the context of the curatorial strategy that I shall be presenting how I define the materials that are making up the exhibition. Although this definition may well vary between projects, less emphasis on the traditions of a historically orientated curatorial practice means that it is important that this thesis provides the necessary criteria by which materials might be included in the exhibition proposed. Much of this articulation shall take place in relation to the theme of the exhibition, that of Burroughs' tape experiments, however before that is considered there are further

⁴ In the case of this thesis, the perceived presence or illusion of absence of curatorial activity is part of the practice of the curator, and part of that strategy of practice.

⁵ Such as the Goldsmiths' courses at the University of London.

contextual terms whose definition will benefit the reader. The reason this is the case is that there is a selection process the curator undertakes that is greatly influenced by his or her reading of, and relationship to, practices. In this case these practices are related to the engagement with sound, and how sound might be considered from an artistic perspective.

This research is presented as a written thesis, however the practice has formed an important part of the identification of the initial problem as well as the methodology of its research and arguments.

The research outputs other than this thesis, such as the exhibition and publication outputs,⁶ are also indicative of a practice-based research and are intended to be useful as such for further projects by others working in the field. Likewise this text is intended to be a comparable and equally appropriate engagement with ideas of meaning-making through curatorial process and one that has been composed symbiotically with the other, more traditionally practice-based, elements. The following chapters treat listening-as-research from an embodied perspective, and as such retain an implicit practice-based rigour. The chapter on the exhibition presents a practice, through which the research deepens and presents further findings in a manner that this thesis is unable to replicate.

This thesis is then one view of the research, a different view, for example, being afforded to those able to visit one or more of the *Dead Fingers Talk* exhibitions, or listening to the compilation of recordings to be released as an LP by Marmalade Publishers of Visual Theory (Jackson 2014).

It will become clear in this thesis that the practices both of listening and of curating function as generative processes. As such both activities, the written thesis and the practice, are inextricable. Indeed I view this written thesis as a practice, in that it presents one form of articulation of the curatorial strategies that arise through interaction between the process of academic writing and the process of generative practice. As such I understand this thesis as similar to that which Robin Nelson terms "praxis", a practice-as-research in which "theory is imbricated within practice" (Nelson 2013:5). As such the thesis also responds to Nelson's reworking of the idea of a "research question" as a "research inquiry" (Nelson 2013:96-97) in terms of the provision of an answer. It will become clear that the shift Nelson suggests is also appropriate for some of the proposed

⁶ The exhibitions are outlined in Chapter 4, the publication output is the curated record *This is a game called 'Hello, hello, here is X.X.'* (Jackson 2014)

emphases that I present in this thesis. Gibson and Clarke's preference for meaning as a system of "affordances" as opposed to "values" is a case in point (see section 1.2).

This shift is also appropriate to Burroughs' approach to materials and activities as a "means of investigation" (see section 3.2.5). The listening and curatorial activities referred to in this thesis are practice-as-research in that they are an investigation with an open research inquiry. Essentially the practice functions as a generative and reflective methodology in the curation, and produces new kinds of knowledge about Burroughs. To use a term Burroughs applied to the results of artistic practice,⁷ the written thesis presents the *effects* of the unpacking of a Burroughsian ideal of space through curatorial practice.

So what is the relation between my practice and this thesis, and indeed why present this thesis as praxis? The link between Burroughs' project and text (especially text that represented or resisted dominant ideological positions) cannot be ignored. It was important for me to use a form of presentation that resisted being read as an explicit art object at the point of contact for the reader, and this is the reason for the thesis's final form. The articulation of Burroughs' activity with tape in terms of his presentation of the materials as a not-art proposition (see section 3.4) demands a creatively more neutral approach. Whilst, as Juha Varto notes, "there is no such thing as a neutral research method" (Varto in Nelson 2013:155), a written thesis at least performs that pretence in its relation to the documentation of the sciences. Although this is a subtle, and easily dispelled pretence, it is nonetheless an important emphasis for the articulation of the project presented within the text.

The usual outputs for my personal research activities are practice-based, predominantly in the form of exhibitions. In addition to its realisation of the objectives identified above, this thesis functions more as a reflexive analysis of research practice delivered through a medium (text) that is relevant to the curatorial. The medium of the written word is relevant to the curatorial being a major part of its public dissemination and having a key relationship to assumptions of knowledge-through-curation, however misguided these assumptions might be. In this sense this thesis represents the practice of presenting a text as evidence of what is it an artefact might be mean.

The Dead Fingers Talk exhibition, which is described in more detail later in this thesis, was deliberately presented with very little support in terms of elucidatory texts, in

⁷ For Burroughs, "what we call 'art' is magical in origin [in that] it was originally employed [...] to produce very definite effects." (Burroughs 1986:60)

order that the audience's investigation of the exhibition might retain an open fluidity (see sections 4.1 and 4.3 for further discussion of this). In a sense, this thesis might be regarded as that missing elucidatory text.

As research presented as written text this thesis has allowed an alternative exposition of my curatorial practice to feed back into on-going projects. Likewise this thesis is a narrative that emerges concurrently with my listening and curating practice re-told through the medium of text in order to present an alternative telling. As such this thesis may be read as a performance of academic writing.

To summarise: the curatorial context for this thesis is one that contends a curatorial practice as an ingrained part of the meaning-making process and in a manner that understands curatorial practice as bound up with artistic production in this process. Such contextualisation of curatorial practice is important at this early stage of this thesis as it greatly modifies accountability to materials curated in terms of the production of the exhibition described in Chapter Four. By this I mean that the curatorial practice in the context defined is not part of a process of reproduction or display of documentation but an active interaction with the contemporary art gallery as a primary site of artistic exchange.

From this the nature of my curatorial strategy and its unfolding in the fourth chapter of this thesis shall rely on the criteria of its activity, that of an association with sound. This exhibition, and thus the thesis, presents the activity of engaging with sound in the arts with a particular curatorial emphasis. I shall demonstrate how this emphasis will require a technical term to describe the materials with which the strategy is engaged, and this term I will be designating as *audial art*. As this is an uncommon term to use in this field I shall provide an account of the way in which sound, as the focus of audial art, is to be considered in this thesis.

0.4 *Audial Art*

Outside of the hegemonic discourses of visual art and music, sound art or sonic art has yet to make itself consistent in the popular conception of the discipline. However from a curatorial perspective an exhibition labelled as sound art or sonic art appears immediately restrictive to organisation bound by media. Despite the transient and mutable qualities of sound works and their apparent ambivalence to fixed contexts, histories and theories, their technology of presentation defies postmedia organisation. It appears that to discuss

sound in an exhibition context one might be drawn to the categories of technology rather than material. Through this thesis I am therefore determined to contribute to the discourse on sound in the arts, but to do so through the application of a model that reflects the mutable qualities of the medium and the inconsistency of the discipline, and do so from the perspective that is not media-centric. It is from this foundation that this thesis emphasises audial art as a multidisciplinary group of practices that have a relationship to sound.

As I shall convey in Chapter One in relation to sound, and as described in the context of this thesis, a visitor's cognition of sound is a highly subjective process that, as I shall demonstrate in relation to the experiments of Konstantin Raudive (1909 – 1974), involves a relationship of meaning indifferent to the presence of authorially intended signification. To define sound in this way demands an expanded definition of an art form of the audial in which sound itself may be absent. This is a domain of artistic practice within which a visitor's relationship to the making of meaning is connected to curatorial strategy by a supposition of interactions between niches. Consequently the nature of the materials found in audial art depends upon those interactions. Therefore in articulating such an expanded definition I will endeavour not to distinguish too heavily between predefined domains of creative production, literature, music or fine art. Thus I will attempt to approach a model of art that operates at the level of experience, as that at which the meaning-making process occurs. Also I attempt to avoid, as much as possible, dominant discourses that operate in distinct fields of practice, whilst avoiding articulation through reference to a hegemony of core technologies or modes of engagement.

The consideration of sound is undertaken in relationship to the meaning-making process that occurs in the “primary site of exchange” (Greenberg et al. 1996:2) that is the contemporary art gallery. What is commonly referred to as the contemporary art “world” can be regarded as a complex, multi-disciplinary, variable blur of organisations, individuals and groups, both real and imagined. Whilst this appears to be the case from my perspective and, I assume, the perspective of many others, this project understands that there appears to be an equally common desire for fixity at least in the work of those who attempt a common interpretation and history.

The central problem is that art is driven as much by practice as it is theory, and in some cases this practice is, intentionally or not, based on arbitrary principles determined

by the unpredictable environments of individual artists, groups or circumstances.⁸ Schools of art, and artistic movements are increasingly less rigid in determining a manifesto or ideology and, in a cultural landscape critical of modernism, may appear increasingly more awkward and theatrical when they do. This applies both to the purpose and the media of production, and is no more obvious than in the regular surfacing of works, exhibitions and artists for which or for whom the audial appears to take precedence over the visual in a *visual arts* gallery, school or section of a newspaper or magazine. It is not uncommon to find in the drop-down menu of an art listings website for advertising events that “sound” is a medium pertaining to the “visual arts”.

Although the ordering of images and sounds are culturally and historically in flux (see for example analysis of image and text in Mitchell (1986)) in the context of Anglo-American art terms such as “the viewer” and other ocularcentrisms, such as “seeing an exhibition” or the incongruity of “a listener’s point of view”, perhaps understandably pervade the discourses associated with the visual arts, even where sound is the medium of choice. However it is becoming more difficult for these terms to be employed ubiquitously and without incongruity in a tour of contemporary art exhibits. Therefore a primary concern when describing an art form for which sound is an important phenomenon is to avoid the easiest route of *seeing* sound in a visual arts context, of appropriating sound into a discourse of the visual.

Embedded within my strategy of considering sound in a curatorial context is the implicit understanding that the boundaries of discourse based on sound in the arts permeate, rather than contest, those of the visual arts. I am not proposing a dualism in arts theory that sets the visual and the audial at opposites of a sensorial divide, but propose a discourse of the audial that acknowledges itself as part of a mesh of cognitive engagement in accordance to the definitions I have so far presented.

As I shall make clear in Chapter One, the assumption of a pure or absolute ideal of hearing is not a priority of this thesis; indeed as this thesis deals with a practical curatorial strategy in dealing with an exhibition, and does so from the practice-based curatorial emphasis of engagement with an exhibition, such an assumption is meaningless. To be explicit on this point: to imagine an ideal interaction of sound as being one of pure, non-subjective authenticity involving the ears as the only external mediator is unhelpful for a curator wanting to engage with visitors, no matter how alike those visitors might appear. For this reason I will, in Chapter One, activate the conceptual device of the *niche* and of

⁸ It is worth noting this organic development of artistic practices is comparable to the experimentalist approach of Burroughs as articulated by Oliver Harris and which I cover in the following chapters.

domains (Maturana and Varela 1980) and of *affordance* (Clarke 2005) in order that I can describe strategy and how that might interact with visitors' relationships towards meaning. I do so to provide the context within which the theme of the proposed exhibition (the tape experiments of William S. Burroughs) and the exhibition itself is to be articulated.

Following this, the orbit around a notion of sound of a domain of practice I am terming *audial art* must be seen to adopt similar understanding. It is not sufficient to have a domain of arts practice that abstracts itself from the physical pressures of sound, the visual or other, traditionally non-audible, sensorial influences on hearing or the psychological variations in its cognition or interpretation. In addition it should also be imagined that a sound itself might have transmuted into another material or energy, it may indeed just be a conception. The emphasis is on engagement, and a visitor-focused dialogue with materials.

For the definition of sound that I shall articulate within this thesis, a field of arts practice to be defined must accept the hallucination of components inherent in sound as I will describe, must acknowledge the presence of other avenues to cognitively engaging with sound than the ear, and must understand that the tools (conceptual and actual) with which we engage with this sound are limited to those interactions of which we are capable (that is to say a domains of interactions engendered by the resources of the niche). It must also understand that the manner in which the visitor interacts with the "making of meaning" in the exhibition context does so in a manner that is relative to the variabilities of need (affordances).

To attempt to avoid terminology that weighs heavily in favour of pre-existing critical separations I need to describe audial art not as a scope of practices, but a characteristic assortment of domains. Whilst doing so it is important that the acknowledgement of purity in listening is incompatible to the types of domains that I will be describing. An example of such purification and the consequences in terms of considering my definition of sound in a pre-existing division of audial practice can be seen in relating my definition of sound to Thomas Clifton's comparison of musical space and, what he refers to as, geometrical space. In *Music as Heard: A Study in Applied Phenomenology* Clifton argues that the separation or distinction of physical and musical space is an important step in the consideration of musical space:

We cannot assume that musical space is anything like, or limited to, our notions of geometrical space and the placement therein of physical objects. [...] To be in

musical space means more than mere existence at a particular place, and therefore has nothing to do with one's physical location. It is all too obvious that placing one's body in the concert hall during a musical performance is not what is meant by being-in-musical-space.

Clifton 1983:138-141

Although Clifton acknowledges that extra-musical noises might make their way into his conception of musical space, he suggests that the cognition of space in music is different from the cognition of music in space. Although the fabrication of space in interactions with sound might be said to occur, such as the fabrication of a space filled with spirits in the case of EVP, the interactions with music and physical space are, in the case of this thesis' definition of sound, inextricable. Likewise the clear definition of various sound spaces and the variety of experiential engagements with these spaces, such as those found in Smalley (Smalley 1992) and his categorisation of Schaefferian listening (Schaeffer 1966) and Schachtel's Freudian dynamics of relation between observer and environment (Schachtel 2001), are approaches to experiencing sound that demarcate spaces and modes of interaction with sound and therefore are not relevant to the curatorial strategy and its response to sound this thesis presents. Such approaches attempt to purify and clarify listening in terms of domains that, whilst interesting in themselves, are challenges to the messiness of the type of polysensory aural environment as it might be understood via Burroughs' project.

Such separations of musical space or distinctions of sound spaces contain sound like a pair of conceptual headphones, directly dissociating it from the miasma of other sensorial and cognitive processes with which it interacts. The emphases of this thesis on diversity in terms of the listening process and interactions with meaning and technology must resist purification of sound (phenomenological or otherwise). Such purification could be seen as a restriction in domains of interaction and a reduction in interactions in terms of the principals of affordances, and therefore is counterintuitive to the focus of this activity on a technology-augmented visitor.

I choose the term audial art to describe a loosely defined discipline whose operants, in gross generality, might not just be regarded as operating within fields designated by terms such as sound art or sonic art, but also in other practices orientated towards a discourse on sound. With regards to this thesis the terms sound art and sonic art are problematic, hence why I shall be describing the project using the term audial art. For me, sound art weighs the experiential context too heavily towards the media of

production (sound) in the same way that visual art would were it referred to as image art. Being described as sound art implies, for me, not that the work be experienced aurally or even be about sound, but only that the work has had sounds used in its production, that is to say that sound art might have an audial genesis but not necessarily end in an audially-associated product. Likewise the term sonic art, coming from the same Latin etymology, designates the work in terms of the process of its production rather than the context of reception. Thus audial art, coming from *auris* and *audite*, the Latin for ear and hear respectively, relates more to the sensorial and/or cognitive context of the experience of the work, just as visual art describes *its* principle process of reception. As this thesis describes a curatorial strategy in which the activity of engaging with art is at the intersection between production and reception then a term that relates more to the sensorial and/or cognitive context of the experience of the work in exhibition is more appropriate. Thus my definition favours the experiential context of the artefact. This could, through emphasis, be read as deviating contextually as a discipline from sound or sonic art, and is in no way critical of using such definitions as long as their use considers the above, particularly when employed comparatively alongside the term visual art. This is not to say that a work of audial art is audible, just that the context of its engagement is centred on an audial proposition.

According to the above I define audial art as the classification given to a creative practice that is perceived (whether actually or theoretically) as either of the following:

It suggests, to the visitor, the medium of sound as its *most evident* sensorial or cognitive focus, or sound stands as the principle method by which the visitor attempts engagement with the work.

Or:

It may be perceived as forming *part* of a larger work, but can be distinguished from the larger work by its audial components responding in the manner that feeds back to the larger work through alteration of the sensorial or cognitive reading of said work, for example: the use of sound on a computer application.

It could be said that my definition of audial art does not define the status of an art form, but an attitude or process that resonates more with an audial than a non-audial emphasis. In this sense it is a *domain* in the manner in which the visitor's experiences change in terms of their status and potential *in relation to* the sensorial context of sound as I have described it above.

According to this definition, it is evident that audial art contains art forms and genres that, either presently or historically, have been considered to inhabit distinct conceptual or aesthetic systems. Audial art extends to, yet not necessarily envelopes, a variety of practices, theories and approaches. According to my definition it could draw from or inhabit text, poetry, performance, music, the visual arts and sound design alongside concepts that are not necessarily considered within an arts context, such as the cognitive orientation of an individual through an environment. Discourse surrounding music, for example, is commonly regarded as requiring different critical apparatus than the art of a sound effects technician working in the film industry might apply. However, examination of the breadth of fields that, according to my definition, might be assumed as audial art would demonstrate practitioners' disregard for such boundaries.

Using the examples of music and the sound effect, even the most basic historical illustrations of combining apparently distinct forms of audial cultural production are likely to be apparent to devotees of music or cinema. In Beethoven's *Symphony No. 6* (1808) the clarinet, oboe and flute are required to imitate the calls of the cuckoo, quail and nightingale respectively, whilst Zoltán Kodály's *Singspiel the Hány János Suite* (1926) requires the orchestra to represent a sneeze. In Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) the soundtrack of the film uses variations of musical score and sound effect when announcing a narrative event, demonstrating how the musical score and sound effect can appear interchangeable (in homage to the live music effects of the silent film era). The Futurist concerts sought to bring the cacophony of industry into the auditorium as proposed in Luigi Russolo's *The Art of Noises* (1913) or the noises of war into poetry as in Filippo Marinetti's sound poem *Zang Tumb Tumb* (1912-1914). Compound this expanding field of sound in cultural production with the use of the La Monte Young butterflies composition *Composition 1960 #5* (1960), the use of lo-fi music blasted from mobile phones as a pronouncement of presence or an audio equivalence of tagging the environment, the use of sampling as a device for satire (such as Mark Bolton and Steve Warlin's *Cassetteboy* project, Chris Morris's radio cut ups, or the plunderphonics of *Negativland*), the broadcasts of the call to prayer from mosques or the peal of bells from churches and the manipulations of standing waves by prehistoric man (Watson 1999). As such the movement of sound in a cultural context may crave the polymorphous criteria of the Wunderkammer in its approach to its definition as a requirement of consideration in a curatorial context. Added to this the cultural use of sound that might be relevant to audial art discourses, the use of sound in alternative medicine as a healing

device, the use of the phrase “no comment” as a parenthesis for silence, sound as a weapon or music as a vehicle for torture in Guantánamo Bay (Worthington 2008), and, of course, the presumption of the voices of ghosts on magnetic tape recordings, the complexities of a domain designated as audial art become extremely diffuse.

It might seem excessive to present such diverse sources as indicative of instances that need to be considered when thinking about sound in the context of art that I am proposing. However, when taking into account the definition I will give to sound in Chapter One, and the context of *curator* and *exhibition* that I have introduced, such excess is necessary. If I base a conceptualisation of sound in relation to meaning on the EVP experiments of Raudive, and articulate this conceptualisation in relation to the need of affordance, as I do in Chapter One, then the allocation of the term *art* on the form of the material is done by context and visitor, not by form or technology. The necessity of this domain will also become clear when discussing the motivations behind Burroughs’ use of sound and the tape recorder, particularly in terms of non-art propositions articulated in Chapter Three.

Describing audial art in the terms as I do in this thesis, particularly with the visitor-focused association with technology, is not to intend a negative critique of artists’ interaction with sound or any assumption of the relevance of artists in the process of exhibiting art. Sound in this defined domain of audial art is the catalyst for potentials in the creation of narratives, rather than the creation of narratives themselves, this is but one way of conceptualising the exchange. Transformed as art, as artifice, sound in audial art inherently incorporates the hidden and the falsified in relation to both its source event and its fugitive intentions. Audial art as described herein acknowledges the hallucination of its components, the visitor-focused nature of its technologies, and the meaning-making process as visitor-determined, albeit with the curator’s supposed influence on the orientation of that process.⁹

The implications for this definition are intended for curatorial practice, as it is a definition that draws its concerns from a curatorial context. That is not to say it might not be useful in other contexts influenced primarily by the orientation towards and within materials analogous to a contemporary collection.¹⁰ The following two implications are among those that suggest themselves to such a categorisation of domains of practice:

⁹ Assuming its existence, this influence, as intimated above, may of course be limited to the instigation of the meaning-making process.

¹⁰ In the expanded definition of collection relevant to the contemporary curator.

1. Categorisation of *Audial Artists*:

As engagement with sound as presented in the context of this thesis will show to have highly subjective properties and follow domains of engagement with phenomena that do not comply with traditional disciplines, the identifying of what does and does not constitute an artist involved in creative enquiry in audial art cannot be universally determined. Thus an ecological process of determination of such individuals is required. For example: responding to a selection process that does not follow a structural criterion but incorporates within its mechanism practice-based, esoteric or arbitrary elements. An example of such a process is documented in Chapter Four of this thesis.

2. Categorisation of content:

In order to adhere to the sensorial ambiguity of audial phenomena and to retain a postmedia approach to thematic relationships, any proposition of content may need to reflect a multiplicity of approaches to sound as a phenomena. As example such a content-sensitive theme could emphasise a phenomenon or trope that might be associated with audial activity yet not necessarily require sound as a result of its production.¹¹ Such a theme would allow interaction with the above categorisation of audial artists, and with a potential audience, that is not only restricted to the personal relationship to sound held by the curator.

Considering sound as a material for which hallucination forms an important part of perception and as a material that cannot be bounded by interaction with the ear, audial art is a domain of obfuscation, falsification but also one of active interaction with meaning.

Likewise the domain must retain somewhat fugitive characteristics in relation to categorisation and documentation in order that it is an honest reflection of its parts. Occasionally the nature of sound itself responds to such demands, as it did in the early process of researching Burroughs' tape experiments at the British Library.¹² When sourcing material for exhibition I reviewed the audio recordings pertaining to Burroughs

¹¹ The theme of the exhibition presented in the fourth chapter is "recording", being not specific to sound, yet having an intimate relationship towards it.

¹² Some of these materials are described in the third chapter of this thesis.

that were being held at the library. In order to obtain copies of some of the recordings for exhibition I had to determine potential copyright holders. Remarkably there was considerable confusion and inconsistency over whether the various recordings could be deemed *music*, *performance* or *sound recording*, the three statuses of copyright holder for sound held at the British Library. I found this immediate resistance to categorisation fascinating in relation to both the sound experiments of Burroughs as well as the problematic nature of defining audial art. The second category does not exclude the first, neither does the third exclude either the first or second. The issue was further compounded by the Burroughs literary copyright holders due to the material frequently containing samples of his written work. Additionally the fact that the recordings often included sounds recorded from television and radio, as detailed in Chapter Three of this thesis, make their copyright status still more confusing. Finally, whilst Burroughs was introduced to the tape recorder as a device for creative practice, he on occasion denied that his recordings were intended as an artistic proposition.¹³ As an example of the instability of categorisation they therefore appear to provide an ideal subject for the consideration of a curatorial strategy for *audial art*. Such instability, when considering the definition of sound discussed earlier, should form an integral part of the curatorial strategy. The Chapter Three therefore presents Burroughs' activities with sound as a case study for a curatorial strategy in audial art. Prior to that, Chapter One presents an articulation of sound relevant to the audial arts and Chapter Two presents my examination of Burroughs' thoughts on *meaning* as an important conceptual framework from which to articulate a curatorial strategy that prioritises meaning-making at the site of exchange.

¹³ This paradox is covered in Chapter Three

1. Contextualising Sounds and Hearing as Unclear and Unstable

In order to be clear about the complexities inherent in the manifestation of sound in an exhibition the section following this shall be relatively detailed in its description of how I have understood such activity in terms of this thesis. To do so I shall start with defining *sound* (with specific relation to how it can be expressed with regards to such artistic activity) and how it informed my definition of *audial art*.

In this thesis I consider sound's various manifestations in contemporary art as phenomena bound up with subjective hallucinations, the influence of psychological states and a synaesthetic relationship to cognition in a manner that is particularly apposite to Burroughs' project. This section will provide the context and support for emphasising these characteristics of sound and of hearing and why they might be important in relation to curatorial strategy.

In this thesis sound can be assumed to have a relationship with human beings in that the context of the exhibition and of artistic production in terms of this thesis presupposes at least one human agent. In this context the most familiar definition of sound is with reference to our hearing and this, in its most common conception, relates to the interpretation of nerve signals transmitting recoded vibrations and their characteristics received from the inner ear. Sound reaches these nerves through a sophisticated series of biological structures whose purpose it is to transmit characteristics of acoustic energy from one structure to the next. Yet as this is not the only interaction with sound experienced by the human body, let alone the response to cognition or conceptualisation of sound by the brain, the experience of sound can hardly be confined to its aural reception. Although this thesis is ultimately concerned with human interactions with sound this is not to say that sound must only relate to the presence of an ear.

To start from a rudimentary definition, sound is sometimes referred to as vibrations in air or other elastic medium. Daniel Levitin, for example, in *This Is Your Brain on Music* emphasises this common understanding by stipulating that sound waves are "molecules of air vibrating at various frequencies" (Levitin 2007:22). However this is to limit the knowledge of sound's presence to its journey, and in many cases only a portion of its journey in total, and Levitin is only raising this assertion to make the condition that

Sound waves [...] do not themselves have a pitch. Their motion and oscillations can be measured, but it takes a human (or animal) brain to map them to that internal quality we call pitch.

Levitin 2007:22

The suggestion is that at least some phenomena we imagine ingrained in sound may be more a feature of our biology than intrinsic to sound waves themselves.

Moreover it is evident that listening to sound does not only prioritise the ear as the frontier of hearing. In the late 1980s the percussionist Evelyn Glennie visited our school, and we heard her give a talk and performance. Glennie, being profoundly deaf from the age of 12, would listen to sound by feeling it pass through her feet.¹ As I was a young percussionist at the time, she was to have an important effect on my feelings about sound and its presences, how it can be made and heard. She made me aware that the act of hearing as a privilege of the ear is not absolute. Pursuing this interest I was subsequently to become aware of how one's voice appears differently when recorded, as the resonance of one's skull is, in a recording, less a part of the hearing than when this voice is uttering from the throat of the listener.

This awareness of hearing sound beyond the ear might, in some cases, be a preferred choice, as in the case of a dancer in a nightclub I interviewed for an audio work in 2000 who would speak of his particular method of listening to the music of a club he frequented: that of closing off his ears and feeling the bass through his guts.²

In addition to these alternative physical relationships to listening, the use or presence of technology can extend the sensorial envelope amplifying and reorganising how we interact with sound and hearing in interesting ways: from the stethoscope for hearing the vibrations of the heartbeat to the variety of methods of visualising sound through software applications such as Apple's iTunes Visualizer. Additionally our increased understanding of the complexities of cognitive engagement with sound is expanding all the time, as in the study of the skin as a hearing organ for speech perception in humans (Gick 2009). And this is not only the case with sense of sound of course, neuroplasticity and cybernetics are showing how malleable our senses may be as in the case of Paul Bach-y-Rita's BrainPort technology, allowing patients to "see" with

¹ The year would have been either 1987 or '88, which was a particularly evocative for me as I would have been approximately the age she was when she lost her hearing.

² The work for which he was interviewed was a 3 hour sound collage titled *Port Roosevelt* (2000-2002) for the installation *Recreation of the first version of the Reality-Simulation-Deck, Time Warner Studios, Port Roosevelt, 1966* (2002) that I curated with the artist Henrik Schrat for the MA final exhibition at the Slade School of Fine Art.

their tongues (Blakeslee 2004), or Adam Montandon and Neil Harbisson's "eyeborg" project that allows Harbisson (who has the condition achromatopsia, which means he can only see in shades of grey) to "see" colour via a head-mounted device that translates colours into sound waves.³

The multifarious nature of experiencing sound, and the potentially nomadic quality of its sensorial reception, are important considerations in anticipation of describing a proposed art form with which sound has a relationship or which relates to the sonic phenomena. On a purely biological level the floor vibrations mentioned, alongside other bodily vibrations such as the pulsation of the guts with the bass in a loud nightclub, may contribute to or replace conventions of hearing. Such alternative manifestations of hearing might therefore require an equally alternative conceptualisation of even the basic idea of sound in an artistic context, both conceptually and practically. However, this acknowledgement of hearing beyond the location of the ear is only one part of this expanded conceptualisation of sound in the arts.

Hearing sound via the ear is one interpretation of vibrations, just as sight is one interpretation of waves, however there are also other considerations beyond identifying the physical location of interactions with vibrations that one might describe as interactions with sound. When we listen we also incorporate added influences into that listening that do not have a compound effect on the structure of the sounds themselves as they journey into the body. These influences might, for example, deal with psychological and/or physiological reactions to sounds in addition to the lack of clarity with regards to hearing as a distinct sense. On the one hand it is worth noting here the oft-quoted McGurk Effect (described in Bank 2012:18-19) that demonstrates how the mind projects meaning on sound from sensorial data gathered from another source, in this case sight.⁴ Cognitive and sensorial activity in the company of listening may therefore have an impact on what sounds are perceived, either unnoticeably for the perceiver, in the case of the McGurk Effect, or in a more individual or extreme amplification of reaction. My own curious inability not to recoil from the sound of a stiff broom on concrete is made more acute seeing the sound being produced.

³ *CultureLab: Cyborg makes art using seventh sense*, 2012. Available from <<http://www.newscientist.com/blogs/culturelab/2012/06/cyborg-makes-art-using-seventh-sense.html>> 27th March 2014

⁴ The effect takes its name from experiments in the late '90s through which psychologists Harry McGurk and John MacDonald demonstrated that viewing a film of an individual saying "ga" but with the soundtrack of the individual saying "ba" produced the hallucination of the individual saying "da". For another example of the effect see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-IN8vWm3m0> (accessed 20th September 2013)

Such influences on sound of sensorial phenomena not implicitly assumed to be part of sound itself emphasise how sound in the arts, and particularly its presentation in the context of an exhibition, cannot be extricated from the company of other factors. If listening processes can be so directly influenced by the presence or absence of other factors different audiences may read their experiences of sound differently. The attempted exclusion of material onto headphones, for example, could be seen as a marginalisation of the listening process for those who find it difficult to equate the experience of listening as a process restricted to the ear alone.

The complexity of individual responses to sounds naturally colour the interpretation of the signals making some categories of sounds highly subjective material. Audial hallucinations may make one think one is hearing that which is not there. A particular response might in some cases be categorised by a listener *as* sound, such as the shudders and automatic reactions invoked by the horror of sound not yet heard. The ear can be trained to hear certain frequencies over others whilst those with the condition synaesthesia may hear sounds that hallucinate information normally received via the other senses, a phenomenon which would doubtless have impact on the interpretation of the sounds themselves. Additionally listening to sound, as a time-based activity, rarely affords the listener verification of what they have heard. Even if the material is presented as a sound loop the circumstances of listening, such as environmental noise, may make verification questionable.

With regards to this expanded field of hearing, it should be clear that the definition of sound for which this thesis is being written acknowledges that hallucination and synaesthesia are not fringe subsidiaries of the listening experience, but are bound up in all listening processes. In fact even in everyday listening, which is of course a more focussed component of the range of experience we call hearing, the brain fills in missing details to provide an experience of reality that makes cognitive sense (Warren 1999 and Shepard in Cook 1999:21-35). In beatboxing, for example, performers take advantage of this filling-in to provide the illusion of simultaneous sounds in their absence (Stowel 2008). In the less focussed activity of hearing, these manufactured details may be more a part of our perceived sensorial environment in that one relies less on the minutiae of the material and more on juxtaposition, associations and memory.

In other studies this cognitive fabrication of sound is capable of being so tangible that its fabricators can focus directly upon it and, rather than become aware of it as illusion, mistake it for being not only actual, but meaningful. In her article 'Phantom

Words' for *Psychology Today* (Deutsch 2009) Deutsch describes her Phantom Words demonstration in which she plays audio tracks containing two words or one two syllable word. These are repeated on both channels of a stereo recording, yet the channels operate out of sync with each other with the second word or syllable playing from one speaker at the same moment that the first is playing from the other.

In her experiments, Deutsch asks participants to make lists of the words they hear in the recordings. As the demonstration develops the participants begin to write down words they hear in the recording that are not actually there. Deutsch also observes that the words appear to have significance to the state of the participant, stressed participants being more likely to hear words and phrases associated with stress.

Thus the participants are not only hallucinating content out of material, but they are doing so with distinct influence of their subjective psychological states. In such a clear demonstration of the effect of psychological and physiological states on the content of a sound recording, Deutsch anticipates an engagement with sound that forces the acknowledgement of hallucination as a component of its model. As a visitor to an exhibition proposition is bound up in the search for, or interaction with, the meaning-making process, such fabrications of meaning are critically important to the definition of sound in the arts. To be used to accurately define an artistic engagement with an audience (as it would in exhibition), such a model must resist the idea of a *perfect reading* of a sound in an associated artwork, but also allow for the fabrication of both material and meaning as an acknowledged component of the exhibition experience.

1.1 Subjective Listening

Not only is hallucination an important component of my articulation of engaging with sound in the context of this thesis, but also the acknowledgement that individuals engaging with a sound must be understood to have potentially different resources from which to decipher that which is being presented. In this case the engagement with the material might intensify the hallucination, or indeed the hallucination might be seen as operating within the niche of affordable resources from which the audience member is able to draw to take part in the cognitive experience of the work.⁵ An example of this process can be seen taking place in the “Electronic Voice Phenomenon” or “EVP” experiments of Konstantin Raudive.

⁵ My use of the term *niche* here is comparable to that used in Humberto Maturana's *Biology of Cognition* (1980), I shall describe this usage shortly.

Raudive's work developed from spiritualist sympathies that the dead were contactable, and that technology was a way of picking up and recording as evidence sounds, images and other phenomena produced by their spirits. As Raudive's EVP experiments are a documented search for meaning in sounds, I shall consider them as an effective model for the relationship between sound and the meaning-making process of engagement with contemporary art.

Breakthrough by Raudive, the English translation and expansion of the shorter *Unhoerbares wird hoerbar* (Raudive 1968), is the record of his most explicit research into mysterious sounds and artefacts appearing on tape recordings, sounds that he interpreted as voices of the dead. *Breakthrough* is, for advocates of the veracity of paranormal research, a book that describes a gateway of communication between the dead and the living, documenting that which Raudive took to be interaction between both worlds via the medium of tape.

Raudive used microphones, radios, frequency transmitters and diodes to record responses to questions on the magnetic tape.⁶ The theory relies on the discovery that the recordings contain sounds that were not perceived to have been present in the original acoustic environment of the recording. In the case of Raudive he made the assumption that these sounds were of supernatural origin (Raudive 1971).

The recordings made by Raudive are indistinct and irregular. The voices they are alleged to contain are brief and (if representative of the voices of living humans) heavily distorted. Explanations offered for the presence of material on EVP recordings that do not require supernatural justification include incomplete erasure of magnetic tapes, interference, auditory apophenia⁷ or charlatanism on the part of the experimenters or their accomplices. It is not necessary that this thesis makes any claims to this regard. What *is* relevant is neither the decoding of the verbal content of these recordings nor the explanation of their presence, but rather the decoding of the process of decoding them. By this I mean how individuals engaging with the mysterious sounds of Raudive's tapes must, as I have already suggested must occur when engaging with sounds in general, be understood to have potentially different resources from which to decipher that which is being presented and how this might be helpful in describing a curatorial approach to sound.

It is a passage in the preface from *Breakthrough* that unintentionally provides an interesting example of how the hallucination of meaning in sound depends upon the

⁶ See (Raudive 1971:20-27) for the various methods used.

⁷ A tendency of the human brain to find meaning in random or meaningless stimuli.

extent of tools related to the detection and extrapolation of meaning that the audience brings to the listening process.⁸ In the preface the book's English publisher, Peter Bander, describes how it was that he was approached to publish the book, recounting how Raudive would introduce the process of collecting and deciphering EVP sounds. He then acknowledges Raudive is multilingual and posits this as a "serious drawback" to his interpretation of the voices, voices that are, of course, unclear. He writes:

Raudive played back a particular passage from a sample tape. According to the printed explanations, the text was: "Te Macloo, may – dream, my dear, yes". Yet to a large number of English people present, the voice said: "Mark you, make believe, my dear, yes". I challenged the interpretation and explained to Dr. Raudive that "mark you" was not only good English but also made sense in the context of the recording. I am convinced that Dr. Raudive's multi-lingual background has something to do with the fact that messages received by him are in two, three or sometimes even four languages. Latvian appears to dominate, Russian, German and occasional words from other languages with which he is acquainted make up the rest. Yet all the recordings I have heard made in his absence are straightforward, in one language. [...] This, I stress, does not affect the basic principle of the recorded voices at all; it is simply a question of how well the vocabulary of the language is known to the listener.

Bander in Raudive 1971:xxii-xxiii

The recordings are, in the most part, recordings of silences⁹ taken in the rooms of the listeners who then interpret them. The silences replayed either contain forgotten noises that are misconstrued as new, or have since been manipulated through amplifying or filtering certain aspects of the recording, or contain sounds from a source only detectable through the recording process. Regardless of their origin the recordings now contain noises differentiable from the background ambience. The audience interprets these "new" sounds, perhaps individually at first but ultimately between each other, to reach a consensus of meaning. Change the listener group and the same sound changes in meaning; the silence is decoded in a different way. Thus the niche¹⁰ of potential interactions with the material presents the field through which the hallucinations of meaning may occur.

⁸ This could be re-articulated as *the niche of available interactions afforded by the visitor* in terms I introduce later in this chapter (see sections 1.2 and 1.3).

⁹ I use "silences" here not to refer to absolute silences but to the silence of those physically present.

¹⁰ 'Niche' is a particular term related to cognition, which I explain my use of in section 1.2.

As would be expected given this analysis, many of the EVP recordings that Raudive and Bander are most excited about are imagined to be mentioning things directly relevant to them, their associates or predicaments even if in the most banal and arbitrary ways. The key point is that their knowledge describes what they regard as the true interpretation of the material, an interpretation that is then confirmed through the consensus of “the large number of English people present”.

As such I find Raudive’s project a good metaphor for the search for meaning in artistic materials, particularly in terms of art as an interactive proposition in Drabble’s “meaning making process”. I am not alone in this as Raudive’s project has also recently been explored by Joe Banks alongside a history of contemporary arts practice (Banks 2012). In his book *Rorschach Audio* Banks presents a survey of examples in which EVP and comparable materials might be conceived of in an artistic context, specifically a context he refers to as “sound art”. From his survey Banks demonstrates how the extent to which “projections” of material absent from the source play a role in “normal perception”, and how it follow that this phenomena links the unconscious and conscious mind of the perceiver (Banks 2012: 42-44). In this way the perceiver is as much a component of the perceived as the material available to perception. When comparing EVP to Freud’s psychiatric assessment of religious beliefs, Banks quotes Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion*, which, in the second half of his attribution, reveals Freud’s assessment of relationship between the practitioners of spiritualism and the pronouncements of spirits:

The appearance and utterances of [the] spirits [invoked by spiritualists] are merely the products of their own mental activity. They have called up the spirits of the greatest men and the most eminent thinkers, but all the pronouncements and information which they have received from them have been so foolish and so wretchedly meaningless that one can find nothing in them but the capacity of the spirits to adapt themselves to the circle of people who have conjured them up.

Freud 2001:30 in Banks 2012:100-101, my parentheses

Likewise Banks also recognises the machines proposed by Alan Turing as revealing more of their programmer’s or operator’s intelligence than having one of their own (Banks 2012:104). Regardless of the belief or non-belief in such practices there is a consistency, found in Deutsch, Raudive (via Bander) and Freud that the articulation of the sounds of noise that contains the supposition of an author of these sounds is geared heavily

towards the articulator whether in language (Bander), emotional state (Deutsch) or other subjective emphasis.

If any further indication is needed that it is the audience (in Raudive's case the experimenter) not the active material (in Raudive's case the spirit) that is guiding the emergence of meaning in EVP recordings there is an interesting opinion offered by Raudive in *Breakthrough*, contradicted by the pronouncements of the spirit world. He asks the rhetorical question:

Which are more reliable, radio-voices or microphone voices? [...] From the point of view of the researcher the problem does not arise, as the authenticity of voices is determined by their language, speech content, and rhythm, in short by all the special characteristics that mark the voice-phenomena. The voices themselves [in terms of the content of their speech] have expressed right from the start a preference for radio-recordings.

Raudive 1971:117

He then proceeds to give examples of this preference, sometimes after prompting the spirits themselves. If one were being sceptical, one could suggest that the word "radio" in the various languages Raudive has at his disposal is more straightforwardly extrapolated from random noise than the more phonetically complex "microphone" (in the case of each of these languages the various translations of the words "radio" and "microphone" have a not-dissimilar pronunciation to their English counterparts). That Raudive experiences these voices in both radio and microphone recordings, and derives equal clarity from both, appears to contradict the spirits' protestations. Even within the logic of Raudive's universe of the undead it is his presence that is guiding the production of meaning.

In demonstrating the complex relationship between source, sensorial reception and cognition in hearing I am emphasising the complicated and unpredictable relationships between artist, artwork, curator and audience in a meaning-making process of contemporary art that relates to sound. This understanding of sound as a phenomenon that arrives not only via the ear but that does so in a way that incorporates hallucination and the direct influence of the listener, indicates a complex relationship to cognitive interaction. Such emphases acknowledge both an expanded and a subjective field of cognition such as that articulated by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela in *Autopoiesis and Cognition* (Maturana and Varela 1980). On the one hand our cultural awareness (in my example our fluency in languages) informs, as displayed by Bander, our

meaning-making interactions. On the other, to return to Levitin's observation that "it takes a [...] brain to map [sound waves] to that internal quality we call pitch" (Levitin 2007:22), features of our biology also have an important interpretive effect. A theory of biological organisation in relation to cognition is mapped out by Maturana in such a way that can be read as consistent with the cultural awareness of language and how it interacts with meaning that I have drawn attention to with regards to my analysis of Raudive's EVP work. Therefore I shall step outside of my focus on sound-related material to review the terminology *niche* and *domain* from Maturana in terms of how it might help in articulating my relationship to sound.

This move will also help to consider sound in accordance with my emphasis as a phenomenon not confined by the mechanisms of the ear but of the whole cognitive body. Maturana's position is to treat cognition as a phenomenon that occurs on all strata, from the cellular to the social, of all living systems, with or without a central nervous system. No explicit differentiation is made between articulating cognition in cultural terms (such as the languages of Raudive) or in biological terms. This is particularly apposite in relation to Burroughs' work with sound that, as I shall demonstrate in Chapters Two and Three, fails to distinguish between biological and cultural systems such as the human nervous system and the tape recorder. Not only this but, as I shall demonstrate, Burroughs' development of his understanding of Cubism into his own cognitive pseudo-science deliberately shuffles together the biological, cultural and metaphysical (see 2.3).

Finally in both the following section on Maturana, and, following this, in section 1.3 on Eric F. Clarke, I am applying theories of ecological interaction between living systems and their environment. I consider such an approach to be particularly relevant to the discussion of curatorial strategy, curating being an environmental and ecological activity in relation to arts practices.

1.2 Sound and Cognition – *niche* and *domain*

To articulate a model of engagement that responds to the emphases I have suggested in relation to sound, there are some useful terms in Maturana's *Biology of Cognition*, from *Autopoiesis and Cognition* (Maturana and Varela 1980). *Biology of Cognition* is an exploratory definition of a living system (whether a cell or a human being) and uses this definition to explore interaction between systems. I shall not present a

comprehensive review of *Biology of Cognition*, but as I shall be making use of the terms *domain* and *niche* as they are used in this text with regard to cognitive interaction, I shall give a brief summary of how they relate to the original text, and then in the manner in which I adopt them here. This section will provide the context and support for emphasising the characteristics of sound and of hearing, described above, and why they might be important in relation to curatorial methodology.

Despite appearing to be revolutionary Maturana's definition of cognition is relatively traditional, yet circumnavigates the anthropocentric bias of cognitive science and its emphasis on intelligence as a product of cognition. This definition of cognition refutes the popular placement of its functioning purely from a neurological system within an organism. This expanded definition of cognition is useful in comparison to my expanded definition of listening as a multifarious, hallucinatory and morphological engagement with sound that doesn't necessarily favour the most direct or most unambiguous route.

Similarly *Biology of Cognition* presents its interpretation of reality not as an objective and reliable external world but as an amalgamation of subjective dynamic realities, or *domains*. Domains are how Maturana suggests we might demarcate areas in which a living system's experiences change in terms of their status and potential. This change is presented in the text as the system engaging with the environment in which it exists and this engagement Maturana identifies as the process of cognition. Thus I shall take up the term *domain* to refer to fields of change, change being moments when the individual engaging with sound alters the status and potential of his or her own (cognitive) structure.

The second term I shall take up from *Biology of Cognition* is the *niche*. Maturana identifies two simple aspects of distinction in the process of observation of a living system. The first is the system itself, the living system, and the second is its environment. The relevant aspects of the environment to the living system he refers to as "the niche". The niche is that part of the living system's environment with which it can interact. It is understandable that an organism cannot have an interaction with its environment outside of the interactions specified by its biological make-up.

In the terminology of *Biology of Cognition*, living systems respond to interactions within their niche, the totality of their potential perceptual reality, and likewise respond to that reality in reference to these possible interactions. The consequence of this understanding is that there may well exist factors that influence the sources of sensory

stimulus, yet do not come into existence for the individual perceiving that source and are therefore unrecorded phenomena in the process of perception, whether or not they affect the results of the perception.

Maturana also emphasises that the niche of the organism, and that which an observer¹¹ of that organism might observe as being the niche of the organism, will differ according to the comparative nature of the organisations of the observer and organism. There may be interactions observed by the observer between organism and an element of environment that, not being part of the organism's niche, is indeed not a cognitive interaction but has been mistakenly observed as such. Similarly there may be interactions the organism makes with the environment that the observer does not observe due to the elements of the environment with which the organism interacts being outside of the niche of possible interactions of the observer.

I shall give an analogy by returning to Raudive's EVP experiments. Raudive perceives the recordings as emanations from a spirit world. He perceives the niche of these spirits as encompassing access to the tape of the tape machine and the radio receiver, and the domains arise at moments when these interactions occur. Whether there are spirits present in this scenario is irrelevant to Raudive's observation of niches and domains. Likewise Raudive's access to a number of different languages might be considered as indicative of own his niche as observed by Bander from which Raudive's cognitive domains (in this case domains of interpretation) are constructed. These domains overlap with those of the "large number of English people present" whose niches are less linguistically variable, yet who, in Bander's judgment, are able to make a clearer interpretation of the transmitted message. Bander assumes the niches of the spirit announcing through the tapes to be more consistent with the English audience than with Raudive on this occasion.

In adopting these terms into an arts context I shall be using the terms *niche* and *domain* to refer to the interactions of material and the visitor to an art exhibition. The visitor may mistakenly recognise cognitive interactions where there are none, or not recognise interactions where they exist, due to differences between the niche of the artist and the niche of the visitor. The curator, whether explicit or implicit in the exhibition process, could be understood therefore as the component in the interaction that seeks to orient the niches of artist and visitor towards each other. In this case the presence of the curator's niche should also be acknowledged, along with the acknowledgement that

¹¹ *Observer* is Maturana's term

speaking about the various niches of artist and visitor is not the same as speaking about the curator's conception of the various niches of artist and visitor.

From the perspective of the curator as an observer, the use of Maturana's terminology helps to articulate differences between how visitors to an exhibition might culturally and/or biologically interact in a meaning-making process, but also how the curator might mistake interactions.

I am to use *domain* to refer to conceptual as much as physical properties of engagements. One's niche might include, for example, a passing knowledge of the history of Death Metal music, a knowledge that might have a potential influence on the meaning-making process when experiencing a particularly cacophonous art installation. Maturana might define this further in terms of his theory of "pure relations" (Maturana 1980:13) and "linguistic domains" (Maturana 1980:30) however the distinction, and Maturana's subsequent complication of cognition, is not intrinsically relevant to the terms of this thesis. A niche might construct conditions for association, such as that of how the assumption of a speaker being the emitter of sounds might also influence the meaning making process whether the sounds are in fact coming from the speaker or from elsewhere.

Establishing *domain* and *niche* as terms through which I am able to articulate interaction with the meaning-making process does not, however, provide a motivation for these interactions. In order to do so I will return to discourse on sound yet retain the perspective of ecological discourse in order to maintain consistency with the above.

Therefore I will take up the term *affordance* from Eric F. Clarke (Clarke 2005) as he has re-articulated it from James J. Gibson (in Gibson 1979) to help articulate my position with regards to sound and its interaction in an artistic domain. Like *domain* and *niche* this term shall help to contextualise how this thesis responds to meaning-making processes in terms of the aforementioned definition of sound, and shall therefore be useful in the articulation for curatorial strategy.

1.3 Sound and Cognition – *affordance*

In this section I look at Clarke's articulation of *affordances* to help build a model of cognitive engagement with sound that allows for discrepancies in terms of the content and sensorial variations in the material's reception, and yet will be practical in the discussion of art works and curatorial strategy. As individuals bringing different cultural

and (potentially) biological systems of organisation to a curated project we are bound to have differing objectives or agendas with regards to what we hope to achieve through such an experience.

Ways of Listening (Clarke 2005) offers an introduction to Clarke's use of the term *affordance* as a development of the ecological theories of perception proposed by Gibson. *Ways of Listening* attempts a consideration of "musical meaning" on the basis of *sound*, that which he identifies as a shared "component of all musical cultures" (Clarke 2005:5).

Clarke presents a number of interactions with sound (Clarke does not propose that music exists in a separate realm of cognitive engagement) and describes their meaning as built from their recognition as indicators of events. He acknowledges that this type of interaction is "critical" for an ecological approach to perception and builds a case for a polarised system of recognition based on identification of a sound's source and the obfuscation of this source (Clarke 2005:32-34). His case is that the more one understands a sound's meaning in relation to its source, the more it becomes "difficult to detect the sound's distinctive features" (Clarke 2005:34). As such Clarke proposes that the focus on sound (listening as opposed to hearing) becomes less attuned to the material the more one becomes more attuned to a meaning-making process inspired by the material. This phenomenon might lead a listener to completely neglect audible material even as the listener is mentally stimulated by the artwork with which they are engaging. Different phases in the phenomena of drifting between listening and hearing have been suggested by other systems of cognition (such as Smalley 1992 in his development of Schachtel 2001 and Schaeffer 1966). This present study does not attempt a rigorous definition of different listening modes or phases as such a definition is counter-intuitive to the curatorial strategy, however it is sufficient to say that there is an inconsistent relationship with domains of hearing in the meaning-making process.

Clarke uses Gibson's concept of "affordance" through which to consider meaning with regards to music. Gibson originally coined the term "affordances" as a replacement for "values" in reference to the idea of values gleaned from interaction with objects (Gibson 1976). His emphasis is on the meaning of an interaction being understood from the interactor's relationship to the interacted, a relationship that, Clarke is quick to point out, may change dependant upon environmental factors (Clarke 2005:37). Clarke's emphasis here on environment-determined shifts underlines his emphasis on environmental primacy; as an example an environment whose factors might suggest the affordance of a guitar being, on occasion, not for making music but instead being for

burning for the provision of warmth or swung in self-defence.¹² Clarke summarises affordances as the “environmental opportunities” for, in this case, the listener.

This interaction that Clarke presents is comparable to the aforementioned definition of niche, the possible set of interactions based upon the system’s structural capabilities. The threat that transforms the guitar into a weapon is, as both of these theories contest, created through an interaction between organism and environment, the field/moment of interaction that I am referring to as the domain. I evoke *affordances* here to present an emphasis on interaction in domains, an interaction that is based on the needs of the organism at that time. Following Clarke, the environmental demands transform that need thereby altering the affordances of the material with which the individual is interacting.

To again make use of Raudive as an analogy: the cursory picking up of voices from the silence of the EVP tapes is altered in the context of need. In one example he records sounds then asks questions, the questions have altered the need and therefore the affordances on which Raudive is basing the preferred domain in which he is listening. The resultant meanings that Raudive derives from the materials may be influenced by emotional stresses (as revealed by Deutsch) but are also influenced by a scaffolding of expectation Raudive has built around the experience of listening. His niche, in the example I gave previously, includes fluency in a number of languages. The interaction of this niche with the sound’s affordances towards Raudive’s questioning of the hypothetical spirits, that is to say the scope of the answers that he expects, is, for Raudive’s EVP experiments, a domain of meaning-making processes. As articulated above, Clarke proposes that a listening as opposed to hearing focus on sound becomes less attuned to the material the more one becomes more attuned to a meaning-making process inspired by the material. Here Raudive might be regarded as enacting such a drift away from the material into the languages of his niche and the meaning-making processes inspired by those languages.

In discussing engaging with sound-related art practices in terms of niches and domains of interaction, and weighing such interactions towards affordance as the means of organising meaning, I am able to define sound in a manner that is highly subjective to its audience and non-specific to technological media of presentation, and one that originates from an ecological engagement apposite to the nature of contemporary curatorial practice.

¹² I use a guitar, as it is an object that makes intermittent appearances as an example object in my thesis. Clarke’s original object in this sketch is a chair.

Ultimately I have arrived at a basic description of sound from which I can begin to define a terminology that supports what is an uncommon approach to sound art discourse. I shall therefore define a technical term *audial art* to contextualise the domain of practice with which the curatorial strategy at the heart of this thesis is concerned.

To recap: the context from which this project understands sound is a context that is expressed in terms of a human engagement with sound from an ecological perspective. This description of sound acknowledges that sound does not relate only to an experience of phenomena that arrives via the ear, but with the potential for phenomena that is in some way observed as sound-orientated but which might follow the patterns associated with other senses, such as touch and sight in the examples given. Additionally to this, the human engagement with sound must also follow an acknowledgement of hallucination and acknowledge that the cognitive interaction with the material will be formed by other specificities relevant to the visitor involved, be they, for example, psychological states in the case of Deutsch, or familiarity with specific languages in the case of Raudive. This description of sound is relevant to the forthcoming definition of *audial art* in that the relationship of sound to *meaning* (here in terms of affordances) inherently brings up obstacles or diversions away from what an artist might intend a visitor to understand from a work.

Thinking of meaning as a domain-based process of ecological affordances determined by the interactions of a visitor's niche with their environment presents a model of artistic engagement with problematic implications for explicit communication of concepts and ideas in the arts. Without a certainty of decoding meaning, or at least a meaning intended by the work's producer, one might imagine that what remains is an art form perforated with lost meanings, unintentional obfuscation, and bursts of indecipherable noise or inscrutable silence. What remains, and the primary reason why I have evoked it so frequently in this chapter, is the essence of cognitive interaction, real or imagined, as the search for patterns in noise typified by Raudive's EVP experiments. This is a meaning regardless of its speculative or subjective relevance to others or its communicability. This relationship to meaning is reminiscent of Barthes' 'Death of the Author' (Barthes 1967), in which Barthes proposes that readers establish their own meaning, regardless of authorial intention. Like Barthes' texts this conceptualisation of engagement with meaning imagines a practice whose meanings and values are fugitive, always shifting, and inherently unpredictable. However, such a conceptualisation of meaning and interaction is also equivalent to the sensorial and cognitive fluctuations of

sound itself as I have defined it in the above: as phenomena that is embedded with hallucination and ontological complexity, and thus whose reliability is open to question.

However there is, as is apparent in Raudive, an orientation that occurs in the visitor's search for meaning. The audience of Raudive's experiments, whether in this case it is himself, a colleague or another unrelated listener, is guided by the contextualisation of Raudive himself, who places the sounds heard within the framework of the supernatural emanations of the dead. Thus it could be said that, by contextualising material for listening, Raudive *curates* the sounds, whilst leaving the material open for investigation within the framework of his project. Banks recognises this "prompting" in his analysis of Raudive, and whilst he does not link this to curatorial practice, it does begin to hint at the role of the curator in the process of exhibiting sound:

The pre-emptive narration characteristic of EVP demonstration recordings, which tells listeners in advance what meanings to attach to the sounds that follow, fixes the interpretations that listeners then project, creating an illusion of exogeny [...] and the illusion that the perceived meaning is shared and therefore objective.

Banks 2012:32

It might be assumed that Banks' simplification of the listener here can refer only to those listeners who are also believers in the claims of the demonstration. However, Raudive's pseudo-scientific claims for his audience can be compared to similar claims of the hypothetical curator introduced at the beginning of this chapter whose defined domains of investigation of arts practices and histories are inherently creative and practice-based, that is to say bound within their own organisation as an affordance-based activity.

As Obrist and O'Neill describe through their individual approaches to a history of curating, the domain of curating is a "laboratory" (Obrist 2008:30) in which curators are "able to take for granted their being a site of diversity, contradiction, and conflict." (Ibid. 122). Such a domain, itself a process of constituting new domains, can therefore be read as a pseudo-scientific articulation of the curator-as-practitioner.

My inference via the example of Raudive, and also earlier of the work of Deutsch, is that interaction with sound involves a decoding that might be read as containing within it the possibilities for what might be referred to as errors, but in acknowledging that hallucination and the specificity of individual resources (niches) are components of the engagement with sound as I have described it then it is inappropriate to describe such possibilities as errors. Instead the material is better understood as artefacts for engagement or interaction through the conditions of affordances that are inextricable

from an interplay of hallucination and non-hallucination. Also present within this definition of interaction with sound is my earlier acknowledgement that the sense of hearing is not divorced from other physical processes alongside these subjective reactions. In support of my articulating a domain of arts practice relevant to sound as defined, there is one more element of listening that is bound to these subjective reactions yet which I have not sufficiently described. I have stated that my thesis follows a postmedia curatorial proposition, however it is important to acknowledge that technology plays an important role in curatorial strategy, whether in terms of its influence on artistic production, or in terms of its presence in the exhibition environment. There for I shall describe the relationship of technology to this curatorial strategy.

1.4 Sound and Technology

Contextualising my definition of sound with regards to the terms described and then illustrated above presents sound as materials that are ultimately focused towards human interaction. This emphasis thus introduces the framework for contextualising a practice based on sound. The section of this thesis that follows this accordingly undertakes to describe a conceptual domain of practices. This domain, as a context, is that which might be useful to a curator, as previously introduced above, engaged in presenting an exhibition, as previously introduced above, appropriate to my definition of sound. However, what this contextualisation also reveals is the recurrent presence of technology in the articulation of sound. In order to suggest a general relationship of sound to technology, and how this relationship complicates curatorial practice, I shall define technology in similar terms used to define sound.

Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook's thorough adaptation of curatorial practice to the field of new media art (Graham 2010) defines curatorial practice in reference to how it deals with new relationships to material and its potential categorisations in a variety of different types of exhibition spaces. They argue that a curator who is active in the contemporary arts "*after* new media art" should consider formalising their curatorial strategy with regards to a "postmedia" treatment of contemporary artworks (Graham 2010:283 my emphasis), that is to say that it be organised, in curatorial terms, with regards to alternative classification than the media used in its display. The term in Graham is "postmedia", which helps to differentiate it from the designations of Guattari's "post-media" (Guattari 1996) and Krauss' "post-medium" (Krauss 1999). The

treatment of materials as defined by their media (paint, video, performance, for example) is, they say, disingenuous for the expanded field of what constitutes arts practice today. Indeed such media-centric organisation might, it could be construed, end in either the marginalisation of less common media or the annexing of practices into complex and unrepresentative arrangements of media.¹³ Krauss' post-medium is more supportive of conventions of media as useful for differentiating their narratives, "embrac[ing] the idea of differential specificity" (Krauss 1999:56) of individual mediums rather than, as Graham appears to, suggesting attempts at a consistency of narrative in terms of mediums as a potential obstacle to curatorial process.

In the discussion of sound in contemporary art exhibitions, the field of practice with which this thesis is concerned, it is clear that the identification of sound in the arts as a sensorial or cognitive context is not the same as talking about sound art as a domain focused around the media of production or related technologies. This disparity between understanding sound as a sensorial concept rather than a medium of production has nonetheless been a significant obstacle to its inclusion in contemporary art exhibits. Sound art, much like other designations of artistic practice, has the propensity to be organised around tools traditional to what might be popularly represented as the core practice, such as the acoustically attuned arrangements of loudspeakers for example. However designating activities with sound in the arts in this way is unhelpful to both the diversity of its current manifestations and its future development. Thinking in terms of *sound art* or *sonic art* may contribute to an emphasis of technological reliance in exhibition context as a factor of its difference, and it is in danger of becoming disconnected from its potentials in the visual arts, or divested of important components of its organisation.

An example of the latter case occurred when Susan Philipsz's sound work *Lowlands* was installed in the Turner Prize exhibition at Tate Britain. The original work was commissioned in 2010 by the Glasgow International Festival and comprised of recordings played under three bridges of the River Clyde in Glasgow, the recordings being of Philipsz singing a 16th Century Scottish lament. In presenting the work at Tate Britain the assumption of focussing the work around its most evident core technology, the mechanisms necessary to reproduce Philipsz's voice, simultaneously stripped

¹³ This approach may appear incompatible with the subtitle of the exhibition presented in Chapter Four: *The Tape Experiments of William S. Burroughs*, which appears to have a direct media-related content. However this subtitle is differentiable from the content in the sense that this exhibition is not an exhibition of "tape experiments" in a traditional sense defined by their media (that of magnetic tape or tape recorders), and the chapter deals directly with this apparent incongruity by presenting a postmedia exhibition about that media (See Chapter Four)

elements that might be understood as being critical to the work: its site-specificity of the Glasgow bridges, and the interactions that those sites had with the material. By considering the work as sound art, a major part of the work was lost, despite that part being intimately related to the sounds produced. Such a postmedia consideration of sound is particularly important in terms of the articulation of sound presented in the previous section in terms of morphological sites of reception and in terms of hallucination and synaesthesia.

This thesis seeks to contextualise an area of artistic practice that is not bound to core technological media, yet at the same time acknowledges that technology is an important component of its production and dissemination. As an area of practice that deals with sound, it is also clear that core discourses surrounding the visual arts may be inappropriate or poorly suited to an audial context. This thesis therefore attempts to present a curatorial strategy that is not sustained by visual metaphor or defined by, for example, speakers, headphones and amplifiers. I am using the term *audial art* to describe such a context.

In order to avoid the definition of audial art as being defined by its technological difference to visual art, or a form defined by the media of its production, but an approach to sound as a sense-based proposition and/or cognitive entity, it might be necessary to view technology through the same process of transformation as that undertaken by the exhibition space itself through the late 20th Century emergence of the curator-as-practitioner. Doing so would acknowledge the technologies of presentation as being visible components in the meaning-making process and as such should be inseparable from work. However, as in the case of Philipsz's *Lowlands*, such a definition of technology may be inappropriate if only core technologies are involved and therefore one might need to adopt an expanded consideration of technology. The necessity of articulating technology in this thesis is that, whilst audial art is not proposed as being defined by a specification of media, technology as an expanded term has implications for curatorial practice. Additionally considering the sources and points of reference that I have up to now, one of the recurrent elements has been the presence of technology: in the sense of technology being a vehicle or device of interaction involved in the engagement with sound.

An expanded definition of technology takes into account the tape machines and radios of Raudive, the floor through which Glennie feels the vibrations of the instruments, and the gallery or space in which an exhibition is curated. Technology in

this context is not the concept of technology that defines the production of “New Media Art”, that is to say the technology that lies at the focus of an art of its (the technology’s) own celebration (see Quaranta 2010). Rather it is, in terms of the context of this thesis, the associated mechanisms with which the work interacts that, in some way, orient the work towards domains of interaction of the visitor. For example: the exhibition with which this thesis is concerned, as a demonstration of curatorial strategy in audial art, takes place in a contemporary art gallery in London. The physical structure of the gallery, alongside the equipment required for each work’s activation, has considerable effect on sound both as a sensorial material - changing the characteristics of sounds in response to the acoustic qualities of the architecture - and as a conceptual cognitive entity - impacting the expectations and cultural significance of the material dependant upon the visitor’s relationship to such a space in terms of the gallery as domain. Technology could therefore be considered as the mechanisms that are employed with the intention of creating domains of interaction concerning the audience and the material supplied by the artists.

In considering the influence of technology on a postmedia curatorial strategy, I shall be further complexifying the nature of the niches and domains of the audience. However, such complexification is integral to the proper understanding of the meaning-making process with which I am concerned as a curator.

In relation to the ecological engagement with environment as articulated via Maturana and Clarke, technology could be understood as a tool that extends the available niche of interactions of the organism and suggests new or different affordances through which that organism might engage with the meaning-making process. Understood as such, technology is also about orienting the visitor towards or away from an experience, and providing, as does the three bridges of the River Clyde, both acoustic and contextual alterations to the experience. However this process could be as simple as a recording device allowing a visitor to experience a sound no longer available, therefore outside of the possibilities of contemporary interaction, or the amplification of sounds that would normally, in their original state, offer a different listening experience.

What the articulation of technology from an ecological perspective highlights is that the use of technology in this context is focused on the activities of the audience. The technology is present as a domain in itself, a field of change, in Maturana’s terms: moments when the individual engaging with, in this case, the exhibition alters the status and potential of his or her own structure of engagement.

What does a visitor-focused consideration of technology signify in terms of the meaning-making process? In Douglas Adams' science fiction comedy radio play *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (Adams 1978-80) this idea is presented as a machine called the Total Perspective Vortex, a device that obliterates the mind of its victim by presenting to them the entirety of the universe and their position within it. Adams takes this idea to an extreme and then, characteristically, undermines it. In the eighth episode of the radio play one of the characters, Zaphod Beeblebrox, is thrown into the Total Perspective Vortex. He is then assumed to have been destroyed by his sudden awareness of the universe of time and space and his irrelevance to it all. The end of the episode has Beeblebrox step from the machine to declare that it taught him what he knew all along, that he is "a really great guy" (Adams 1978-80:Ep. 8). However in a subsequent episode (the twelfth episode), it is discovered that, unbeknownst to him, he was in fact inside a replica universe that has been built for the purpose of hiding him from his aggressors. As the reason for the presence of the replica universe, Total Perspective Vortex and all, is Zaphod Beeblebrox, his relationship to that universe is to be the single most important entity in existence. Adams' invention plays back the universe as a subjective simulacrum of the subject. Likewise the issues of EVP that Bander addresses in his introduction to *Breakthrough*, and that Banks cites in Freud, present technology as a medium for which materials are only relevant to cognition in terms of the meaning-making process in the manner in which that process unfolds with the visitor as the central character of the narrative. In terms of a curatorial proposition, the visitor, not the material, becomes the focus around which the machine must be built. This conception of technology is relevant as a starting point from which to address its presence in *audial art*.¹⁴ This visitor-focused definition of technology fits the articulation of an art form from the perspective of the Raudive experiments in that the artists in the Raudive experiments (the spirits) may in fact be non-existent. In accordance with this emphasis I shall articulate a relationship to technology from the basis of the individual engaging with it.

As technologies present to us the expanded world, for example the worlds hitherto hidden from our senses through the invention of x-rays, radio broadcasts and space travel, we are presented with new limits to our senses and with new concepts of infinity and of our mortality with respect to that infinity. Freud describes how, in the presence of new technologies:

¹⁴ An example of a visitor-focused application of an expanded definition of technology would be the replacement of a concert hall with a contemporary art gallery. In some circumstances the latter might be a better fit for the listener even when the former is a better fit for the art being exhibited.

Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times.

Freud 1930:91-92

Yet, as Freud goes on to say, this age does not end at the instant of writing (for Freud “precisely with the year 1930 A.D.” for who knows what technologies follow. Such prosthesis makes us “Godlike” but, Freud suggests, “present-day man does not feel happy in his Godlike character” (Ibid. 92) for the opening of new frontiers reveals more of our insignificance.

To counter this fear of irrelevance one might create representations of ourselves reproduced through these new infinities, relating discoveries always anthropocentrically back to us. Zaphod Beeblebrox experiences the universe as an environment that relates fundamentally to himself and, in a sense, his cognitive interactions with it. In Raudive’s voices Raudive finds the languages he is familiar with, whilst the audience to which he brings these voices find only English. In this way the technologies of production become extensions of our selves, echoing back the operation of our cognitive operations and engagements with the world.

This consideration of technology offers itself as an echo chamber as well as an extension of biological potential. Such a characterisation of technology bears comparison with the concept of the artist’s instrument performing as an extra limb. The instrument (musical or otherwise) can be suggested as an extension of the artist’s body, but also a tool whose utterances are only compliant with the cognitive niche of the visitor. Likewise a pair of headphones extends the potentials of engaging with stimuli, yet can only impart stimuli that the listener is able to cognitively engage with.

To demonstrate the importance of these two conditions for a consideration of technology in the arts I shall start by unpacking the first proposition: that the function of technology is to extend the biological potentials of the artist and visitor. Then I shall do so with the second: that the cognitive engagement with technology presents, as per Raudive, only that which the artist and/or visitor is capable of engaging with. In doing so I shall consider the impact of such propositions in the consideration of technology in audial art on curatorial strategy.

Considering technology as a tool that extends the biological function of the individual is a relatively straightforward assumption of its purpose. However quite how intrinsically it does this is less well known, particularly in terms of operations that are less

conscious in the mind of the individual employing the technology. To be aware of the less conscious effect that technology has on our assumptions of self would have an important role in how a curator might consider technology in the terms of the meaning-making process.

In 2009 an experiment in this field was conducted at the University of Claude Bernard, France, described in the journal *Current Biology*. It presents details of the unconscious effect of technology on how the mind understands the body. This experiment refers to “the body schema [which is a] somatosensory representation” on which the human brain relies to control bodily movements (Cardinali 2009).¹⁵ Thus identification of the brain’s impression of the body’s representation *without* the conscious mind’s conception of that impression would provide evidence of an unconscious assumption of technologies as extension of the self.

The review of the experiment describes monitoring subjects grasping an object with and without a mechanical grabber, recording the activities via a “high-resolution optoelectronic three-dimensional motion tracking system” using infrared markers (Cardinali 2009). The experiment concluded by demonstrating that when grasping the object without *but after using* the grabber, the parameters of the body schema had been modified in the direction of assuming that the grabber remained. Cardinali (et al.)’s results thereby supporting the hypothesis that one’s brain’s unconscious conception of the body is redesigned in reaction to tool use to incorporate the potential reach of tools.

Mach, quoted in Kern (Kern 1983:133-134) refers to the “space of the skin [as] the analogue of a two-dimensional, finite, unbounded and closed Riemannian space”,¹⁶ however such a conception of the boundaries of the skin as the boundaries of the human being is fundamentally destabilised by this evidence of the mutability of the body schema. The impact of technology, in this case “the grabber”, that opens up the boundaries of the body not just consciously as a projection but unconsciously as the mind reorients the body to its new composition. Considering this unconscious re-organisation of the body in the presence of technologies presents an important consideration of the impact of instruments such as the microphone, the speaker, the

¹⁵ The body schema, it should be noted, refers to an *unconscious* awareness of the body, as opposed to the body image, which is more commonly taken as a conscious awareness. There are, of course, ways of manipulating the body image both controlled, such as those exploited by developments in haptic technology, or uncontrolled, such as phantom limb.

¹⁶ In reference to Riemannian geometry, a non-Euclidean geometry developed by the mathematician Bernhard Riemann (1826 – 1866) relevant to topological objects and spaces.

amplifier, mixer, effects deck and the recording device on one's cognitive engagement with sound whether artist or visitor.

I am presenting a curatorial strategy that is considering technology as a domain that is visitor-focused both in terms of it being an extension of niches of activity and a verification of the visitor's significance in the meaning-making process. The impact of this is that the artist and artwork might appear secondary to the process itself, and in a sense this is exactly what happens. In this context, the visitor is the maker of meaning whilst the curator is the prompter who orients the visitor towards the commencement of this process and potential domains mutual to both. If the material presents an affordance that the visitor is able to interact with then the orientation might be considered a success, regardless of whether this affordance is that which is determined as correct by the artist.

Consider Marcel Duchamp's signed urinal, *Fountain* (1917), as an object that is "generative – spawning a world of ideas" (Goldsmith 2011:111). Walter Arensberg is quoted in Beatrice Wood's account of the work's infamous trial for entry into the 1917 exhibition by the Society for Independent Artists as saying in *Fountain's* defence that through the artist's choice "a lovely form has been revealed, freed from its functional purpose, therefore a man has clearly made an aesthetic contribution." (Tomkins 1997:182). His assessment was notoriously contradicted, albeit via a replica, by artists Björn Kjelltoft and Yuan Chai and Jian Jun Xi who urinated into the work, demonstrating that its functional purpose was still very much available to those willing to comply with the object's more traditional use. These extremes of behaviour signify affordances that are very different. However both engage with the meaning-making process in important ways. It could be further argued that the urinal itself was technology rather than material in the sense that Duchamp introduced the work as a "thought" (Duchamp in Tomkins 1997:170) and thus the urinal as a technology that allows this thought to be amplified towards a domain of interaction accessible to its audiences.

As I have mentioned above, developments in the technologies of the 20th Century and beyond significantly opened up the reach of the body in terms of dealing with new and expanded sensorial environments. Microscopes and telescopes, radio, television, computers, x-rays, ultrasound, wireless technology and the Internet have created new frontiers into which our body schema can extend, whether outwards, inwards or into abstract or alternative environments. Considering how all these things (from

microscopes to the Internet) could be conceived as being integrated into the body schema, a potential visitor to an art exhibit becomes a versatile entity whose organisation is in some ways configurable by the curator. The limits to this configuration however are dependant on the niche of the visitor as the experience of technology may well multiply domains of interaction but may do so to place them beyond the niche of their audience. Hence why a curatorial strategy that is visitor-focused in terms of its use of technology is an ethical proposition for curating arts practices.

The articulation of an arts practice that revolves around the emphases of sound, as described above, and in the context of technologies of exhibition that are visitor-focused in terms of being extensions and relations to a hypothetical visitor, is a domain practice that is directly relevant to a curatorial strategy. It is not proposed as a strategy of artistic production, but rather a strategy that prioritises a visitor responding to a meaning-making process.

1.5 Conclusion

In the introduction and opening chapter of my thesis I have articulated the basic terms of a curatorial strategy that deals with sound in the arts. This strategy is not proposed as a definitive strategy but an example with very particular emphases. These emphases are presented in part in the anticipation of an exhibition that responds to the experiments with sound Burroughs undertook in the '60s and '70s and pre-empts the more complex, content-specific relationships presented in the following chapters. Therefore these terms are intended as contexts for a curatorial strategy that deals with ideas on sound and meaning found in the work of Burroughs.

I have articulated the context of the *curator*, which, with regards to this thesis, responds to a postmedia practice-based proposition in the context of a contemporary art gallery. The curator, in terms of this thesis, responds to a hypothetical collection as an important creative component in the meaning-making process.

With reference mostly to Raudive's documentation of his experiments with Electronic Voice Phenomena, I have articulated how this thesis considers *sound* as a phenomenon in the meaning-making process. Sound, as I have described it here, is bound up with its own hallucination, with an uncertainty of its veracity, with a morphological relationship to the body and its cognitive functions, and with synesthetic

experiences. This articulation of sound requires an expanded acknowledgement of how a visitor engages with sound in the arts.

I have borrowed the term *domains* from Maturana with regards to the process of interaction, emphasising interaction in domains as a change in status or potential. I have also borrowed the term *niche* from the same source in order to describe distinct apparatus that individuals bring to the meaning-making process, and whose distinction forms the subjective relations to domains of interaction. I have borrowed the term *affordances* from Clarke to suggest the character of meaning with which the individual is engaged.

With reference to Raudive's experiments I have given examples of how the niche of individuals might differ, using the example of monolingual versus multilingual fluency. Through this I have suggested the cognitive domains of sound interactions as being predominantly self-referential in their organisation, and characterised by *need*. I have considered this conceptualisation of engagement with meaning as one that imagines a practice whose meanings and values are always shifting and inherently unpredictable, but which, through meaning-making domains, can be considered in terms of engagement with meaning through affordances. This understanding of sound is one interpreted from the curatorial position articulated at the beginning of this chapter.

I have suggested an expanded consideration of *technology*, a consideration that therefore presents technology as a component of the artistic exchange, yet does not subdivide technology into groups nor justify a curatorial practice based on media. This chapter also presents technology as something that is incorporated unconsciously in the organisation of the individual's niche, and suggests a curatorial proposition that technology is visitor-focused. This suggestion responds to the consideration of Raudive's EVP experiments as an allegory of engagement with contemporary art, and the individual's interaction with materials as the location of the meaning-making process.

As a consequence of the emphases employed in terms of *curator*, *sound* and *technology*, and the conceptual devices of the *niche*, the *domain* and *affordances*, I have arrived at a definition of *audial art*, presented in the introduction, from the perspective of a curatorial proposition. This definition incorporates the characteristics of my articulation of *sound* in that it accepts hallucination, synaesthesia and morphological sites of engagement, but attunes these characteristics with practices with an emphasis on the point of artistic exchange rather than the traditional sound art/sonic art context of production.

The model of *sound* and of *audial art* articulated in the introduction and this first chapter shall form the basis of my account of the exhibition. This formulation shall demonstrate the validity of considering artistic production in this way in terms of a curatorial proposition at the site of artistic exchange: the contemporary art gallery. Prior to that I shall present in the following two chapters my research into Burroughs with regards to his theories of creative production and his activities with sound in the '60s and '70s. This research shall be limited by its relationship to the articulation of sound and audial art as described here, and contextualise the exhibition project in relation to its theme.

2 William S. Burroughs and Meaning-Making

2.0 Introduction

This is the first of two chapters that examine William S. Burroughs in detail in anticipation of an appropriate strategy for curating the exhibition presented in Chapter Four. In this current chapter I bring the definition of an exhibition as a site of a meaning-making processes into focus in terms of what such processes might mean for Burroughs. I shall consider how Burroughs might suggest a relevant area of interest for audial art and a curator-as-practitioner methodology. This chapter on meaning-making and space in Burroughs' writing and practice will form the background to the curatorial practice examined in Chapter Four.

In this chapter I shall focus on how Burroughs' attitude to meaning-making might be informed by his interest in Alfred Korzybski's General Semantics and his relationship with the artist Brion Gysin. I examine Burroughs' famous writing technique of cutting up pages of text and re-arranging them into new compositions and how this technique might be understood as an interesting creative practice in relation to the meaning-making process. I also look at aspects of Burroughs' mythology and how it reveals explicit pronouncements on creative practice and its potential outcomes. I shall then be able to take my articulation of meaning-making in Burroughs forward in Chapter Three, in which I shall address Burroughs' relationship to sound.

These two chapters then will give the reader a Burroughsian perspective on two key factors of consideration in curating an exhibition of audial art.

2.1 Burroughs and Meaning-Making

Burroughs was beginning his foray into experimental literature and cross-media practice at a time in which mainstream cultural practice in Western Europe favoured traditionalist emphases that engendered an atmosphere of stability (Godfrey 1998:55). Traditions of painting and sculpture of the post-war period in the visual and tactile arts attracted a stability that was an evident contrast to Burroughs' chaotic production. Burroughs was, after all, associated with a Beat Generation "petulant toward tradition, and indifferent to order and coherence" (Brustein 1958).

Burroughs' relationship to a meaning-making process is complex and appears to be developed through extensive reading; by his own practice-based discoveries; and underlined by his belief in a magical universe. The latter of these is closely linked in Burroughs to artistic practice: "What we call 'art' – painting, sculpture, writing, dance, music – is magical in origin." (Burroughs 1986:60).

By the time Burroughs was introduced to the tape recorder as an instrument for creative work, a purpose Burroughs was to expand upon significantly, his intellectual perspective had already been heavily influenced by a number of individuals who would, as I shall demonstrate, form the bedrock for his understanding about meaning, sound and the potentials of recording technology.

I shall review sources that I have found to have the potential to reveal a profound influence on the language Burroughs employs around his later theories of meaning, cognition and interaction. Firstly though Burroughs' relationship to source material requires a mention. In relation to Burroughs' use of theory Oliver Harris writes:

What makes Burroughs so interesting is inseparable from his *failure* to apply or develop theory "properly". His cut-up project of the 1960s is a case in point: the priority Burroughs gave to experimental and material practices has been lost in the theoretical shuffle, as critics have reread his texts in light of the "linguistic turn" of (post)structuralism, when it was precisely the *lack* of such a theorized context that enabled Burroughs' experimentalism in the first place.

Harris 2003:38 (original emphases)

It should therefore be acknowledged that the intellectual adaptation of these theories is not a linear process of development, but a practice-based assemblage of elements. Thus the sources to which I refer are not to be read as the preconditions of an ideological framework, but as articles of practice or materials for Burroughs' methodology.

As such Burroughs comes to an engagement with theory from a relatively pre-modern perspective in-keeping with his belief in a magical universe (for a discussion of Burroughs in relation to pre-modernist or amodernist attitudes see Murphy 1997). Accordingly, and indeed with the premise of curator-as-practitioner, my articulation of Burroughs' attitudes to meaning should be read as a gestural articulation of Burroughsian meaning, albeit an inferential one, rather than a chronological arrangement of his ideas.

I shall draw upon sources that appear to have had a demonstrable effect on Burroughs' ideas of meaning (such as Alfred Korzybski and, in Chapter Three, L. Ron Hubbard) whilst also looking at Burroughsian meaning in relation to sources he would not have had access to (such as Eric F. Clarke as introduced in Chapter One). In considering these sources I shall expose how Burroughs might be seen to arrive at ideas about meaning relevant to curatorial practice. I shall also demonstrate how his ideas on meaning provide the intellectual context for his work with sound recording technologies and for his ambitions for creative practice.¹

The first of these sources, Alfred Korzybski's *General Semantics*, will reveal itself to be a significant point of reference to Burroughs' understanding of meaning. Additionally however, Korzybski will also provide a potential source for a space/time dialectic found in Burroughs. This is particularly relevant for the consideration of curatorial activities as space and time are evidently matters of importance to curatorial strategies dealing with a time-based medium such as sound, a medium that also has claims over space in its broadcasting and diffusion. The idea of a separation between space and time might be seen to contradict the influence space and time have upon each other if read literally in terms of the physical universe, and so the determination of what Burroughs might mean when he discusses space and time could be seen as being a key consideration in the formation of a valid strategy of curatorial practice. Therefore in addition to considering meaning in Burroughs from his use of Korzybski's ideas I will also explore Korzybski's theory of Space-Binding and Time-Binding in terms of how it might relate to Burroughs' project.

2.2 Burroughs on Korzybski

Burroughs viewed the established status quo of North American society as an authority that kept him distanced from his desires and needs in the form of a cultural climate of homophobia and narcotics control. In a quest to escape this "intellectual uniformity" (Burroughs in Odier 1970:61) Burroughs would sympathise with alternative thinkers such as Wilhelm Reich, the author of theories on Orgone energy, Alfred Korzybski, originator of *General Semantics*, and L Ron Hubbard, architect of *Dianetics* and *Scientology*.

¹ These ambitions are tied up in Burroughs' ideal of space explored in Chapter Three.

The influence of Wilhelm Reich appears to be primarily for, what Burroughs considered to be, the therapeutic value of Reich's project, a belief Burroughs appears to have held up until his own death in 1997.² Additionally, in *The Lost Years of William S. Burroughs: The Beats in South Texas*, Johnson writes of the direct influence on Reich's Orgone theories on Burroughs' largely unsuccessful attempts at farming (Johnson 2006:14), however beyond these practical uses of Reich, his influence appears less significant in comparison to Burroughs' interest in Korzybski in terms of meaning and Hubbard in terms of the intellectual justification of his experiments with sound. Returning to the impact of Hubbard's work in Chapter Three, I will, in this section, consider the influence of Korzybski's theories of General Semantics.

It is recorded that Burroughs found himself sympathising with Korzybski's theories of General Semantics at an early stage in his development as an experimental writer (Morgan 1991:71-72) and these theories were to become a prominent conceptual basis for Burroughs' intellectual progress towards a theory of communication and perception.

Burroughs attended a series of lectures by Korzybski in 1939 in which Korzybski summarised the premises of General Semantics outlined in *Science and Sanity* (Korzybski 1933) that Burroughs is reported to have read in 1936 (Mottram 1977:13). The premises include a description of mankind as a "Time-Binding" entity and it is this definition that Burroughs later appears to adopt in reference to his own theories. *Naked Lunch* begins to capitalise the first letter of "Time" in relation to "junk Time" and "the Time of others" (Burroughs 2005:167) and then something that can be exchanged or controlled by "Time Monopolies" (Ibid. 181):

"So what you want off me?"

"Time."

Ibid. 170

But it is in works from 1970, such as *Electronic Revolution* (Burroughs 1970) and *The Job* (Odier 1970), in which Burroughs, as I shall demonstrate, makes the debt to Korzybski more explicit.

² In interviews the British writer Roger Clarke conducted with Burroughs in the year before his death, Burroughs shows Clarke the orgone accumulator he has installed in the back garden of his home in Lawrence, Kansas. The accumulator is also demonstrated in Howard Brookner's movie *Burroughs* (1983).

In terms of Korzybski's definition of Time-Binding, in *Time-Binding: The General Theory* (1924) Korzybski states that much of language refers to systems or processes whose necessary condition is, he suggests, that of a variable. To use Korzybski's own example, the word "science" is not a constant but may refer to "science (1924)", "science (1500)" or "science (300 B.C.)", not least, beyond Korzybski's example, to different interpretations of science irrespective of historical association. The variable nature of words such as *science* and, as per his examples, *civilization*, *humanity* and *mathematics* produces statements that, according to Korzybski, are neither true nor false. Furthermore he suggests that the words *man* and *animal* refer to ideas not to things, and are useless in terms of any language that requires "correct symbolism".

Following this Korzybski attempts to create a way of talking about humankind, what he refers to as man, or animal that allows for distinction between the two signified referents. He chooses to base his distinction on the nature of humankind's use of high levels of abstraction in language. Korzybski suggests that humanity has a tendency to objectify the higher abstractions of language, giving money as the most obvious example of objectification. He suggests that humanity must "not forget the reality which is behind the symbol" otherwise the "value behind the symbol is doctrinal", that is to say based on ideas or variables (Korzybski 1924).

The use of high levels of abstraction, Korzybski argues, allows for a "cumulative" entity, using the adjective cumulative in reference to the passing down of knowledge from one generation to the next. The distinction that he makes therefore is that an animal, in his example an amoeba, is a "non-cumulative" or "less-cumulative" category of living entity whilst human beings are cumulative entities. Using this observation as the primary distinction between the amoeba and the human prompts Korzybski to coin the term *Time-Binding* in relation to the activities of humankind and *Space-Binding* in relation to those of non-human animals.

It is evident that Korzybski's theories of Time-Binding and Space-Binding and their relationship to Burroughs' understanding of meaning in a magical universe were of immense importance to Burroughs' throughout his career. Over fifty years after attending Korzybski's lectures in Chicago, Burroughs was still referring to associations between Time-Binding and human beings in his book *Ghost of Chance* (Burroughs 1995). In *Ghost of Chance* Burroughs discusses time as a "prison" and "affliction" that humanity imposes on a population of

lemurs in Madagascar (Ibid. 16-17) who, in contrast, find “time and sequence and causality [...] repugnant and difficult to understand” (Ibid. 15). Burroughs’ lemurs prefer a spatial universe where magic still plays a major role in occurrences, in contrast to the anathema of cause and effect. The importance of these theories and the “less cumulative” entity shall therefore be an important prerequisite for the determining of Burroughs’ attitude towards meaning.

Although references to Korzybski’s theories similar to those from *Ghost of Chance* appear in Burroughs’ texts that predate the core period with which this thesis is concerned, a decisive reference to Time-Binding appears in *Electronic Revolution* (Burroughs 1970), a text that was written at the epicentre of his activities with sound and which focuses on applications of audio technology.

In *Electronic Revolution* Burroughs summarises Korzybski’s Time-Binding and its relation to the word. He suggests that the principal technique that caused humanity to be Time-Binding is the practice of writing, a practice that is both cumulative and has the tendency to create true or false abstractions through generalisation. Thus Burroughs sees writing as the tool of oppression and from this point approaches text as a tool to be understood in order that one might free oneself from text’s conditions. For Burroughs these conditions tie the individual into limitations of meaning based upon past conditioning and a fulfilling of a pre-recorded cycle of behaviours. These limitations of meaning could be considered comparable to Korzybski’s understanding of the variable nature of words. Korzybski’s examples of the unreliable nature of words such as science, civilization, humanity, mathematics, man and animal can be somewhat straightforwardly traced through to Burroughs’ use of the term fugitive in relation to language in his own glossary of his first published novel *Junk* (2003)³ in which he states the following:

Not only do the words change meanings but the meanings vary locally at the same time. A final glossary, therefore, cannot be made of words whose intentions are fugitive.

Burroughs 2003:133

³ Originally intended to be titled *Junk*, *Junk* was first published in 1953 under the pseudonym William Lee (Lee was Burroughs’ mother’s maiden name) as *Junkie: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict*. Rather than published as a separate book it was bound together as part an "Ace Double", with *Narcotic Agent* by Maurice Helbrant, a previously published 1941 novel.

In this brief extract Burroughs drops the specificity of Korzybski's analysis of language, appropriating his conclusion to address the indiscriminate fluctuations of meaning in slang terminology. Similar to Harris' observation on Burroughs' "*failure* to apply or develop theory "properly"" (Harris 2003:38 [original emphases]), Burroughs does not follow the exact letter of Korzybski's reasoning but uses it as a resource to describe his environment, in this case the slang talk of drug addicts and pushers in North America.

Burroughs also re-interprets Korzybski's ideas of 'Time-binding, via connecting the processes of writing and Time-Binding using his own ideas of viruses being composed of pieces of word and image, and of the word as a virus that has achieved symbiosis with the human organism (Burroughs 1970:5-8).

Korzybski's definition of man as the 'time-binding animal' has a double sense for Burroughs. On the one hand, human beings are binding time for themselves: they 'can make information available over any length of time to other men through writing.' [...] On the other hand, humans are binding themselves into time, building more of the prison which constrains their affects and perceptions.

CCRU (Cybernetic Cultures Research Unit) 2004:282

For Burroughs, humans have been forced into a Time-Binding existence through the contraction of the word/image virus, a virus through which we are mistakenly programmed to accept a false relationship between the world and meaning mediated by words and images. Leaving the supporting restraints of time, directly bound to language, is to move into a space "literally unthinkable in verbal terms" (Burroughs in Odier 1970:6), which is to imply a cognitive experience in which the limitations of words are insufficient in dealing with a boundless (rather than a pre-recorded) reality.

Burroughs' premise is that knowledge based on his appropriation of Korzybski's concept of Time-Binding is not just useless but in fact detrimental to "travel in space", a concept that Burroughs appears to associate with a road to freedom: "To travel in space you must leave the old verbal garbage behind" (Ibid. 7). This space, for Burroughs, becomes an ideal where mechanisms of control through definition (for Burroughs, word and image) are meaningless.⁴ However this is not to say that such knowledge is useless, as it is the understanding of what language is that, for Burroughs, allows the negotiation of the road from time to space, for it is through language that Burroughs intended to expose the point

⁴"Image and words are the instruments of control" (Burroughs in Odier 1970:51)

from which we might negotiate an engagement with his notion of space-as-ultimate-liberation.

Burroughs encapsulated his issues with the society into which he had been born and brought up into a philosophy of control and power struggles. At the heart of this philosophy was the feeling that his actions were being lead by other forces whether official: the “boards syndicates and governments of the earth (sic.)” (Burroughs 1964:3), or spiritual: his own shooting of his partner Joan Vollmer being the fault of an “Ugly Spirit” that made him do it (Burroughs 1985:18). Seeking a freedom beyond the constraints of social order and what others considered was a suitable way to behave Burroughs was on the lookout for theories that hit at the heart of conventional Western thinking.

In his theory Korzybski demands an acknowledgement of language as a limiting structure to human perception of reality, and such grandiose claims as to the inefficacy of something so central to Western democracy, not least the key document by which the United States verifies its own constitution: The Constitution, would have arguably been immensely attractive to Burroughs in the development of his project.⁵ Korzybski described the presence of a gap between words and reality. Burroughs appears to see this gap as a barrier to a complete interaction with reality, a barrier to space, erected by the propagation of the virus of Time-Binding language.

Thus read, the histories and futures alluded to by time and by language are meaningless for a Space-Binding individual (although I accept that Burroughs’ use of the term space here is different from Korzybski’s, Burroughs never makes his alternative uses of the term space explicitly so). This Burroughsian Space-Binding individual finds the interaction of language repugnant, exploring instead the interaction of bodies and objects freed from the control of the word virus.

Thus Burroughs’ relationship to meaning as it might be understood via the influence of Korzybski is one that describes meaning as an entrapment by words that simulate a meaning-making, and which doing so, obscures an ideal domain (associated with Space-Binding) in which meanings are fluid.

To return to the publication of *Junky*, and the revealing statement embedded in its glossary, it is a work that first presents Burroughs’ sympathetic characters of the societal

⁵ Burroughs’ acerbic *A Thanksgiving Prayer* can be read as a summary of much of what Burroughs finds objectionable about the United States (Burroughs 1989:7-8)

outsider (in the case of *Junky*, characters whose identities are configured around their various relationships to illicit use of drugs) from which all of Burroughs' future sympathetic characters develop, therefore its description of the use of language of these characters is particularly useful. In Burroughs' work, his language is frequently colloquial and littered with slang and often relies on gut reactions such as revulsion and laughter suggesting an immediacy of objects and bodies. It is as if the starting point of Burroughs' "fugitive" glossary of the outsider (who themselves are literal fugitives from society) is then taken through a process of exponential exaggeration through subsequent texts written in the '60s and '70s.

Burroughs' work emphasises an inconsistent and unstable language, which acts as a technique of illusion and parody against the establishment who, for Burroughs, use image and word as means of control. As I have demonstrated above, this can be directly connected to Burroughs' idea of fugitive meaning, as an extreme development of Korzybski's multiple meanings of words that refer to systems or processes whose necessary condition is that of a variable. Burroughs' destabilising of language is, for him, a step towards Space-Binding, which Korzybski suggests is the cognitive domain of interactions experience by non-human animals, but which for Burroughs is an ideal domain of existence "literally unthinkable in verbal terms" (Burroughs in Odier 1970:6). In the Space-Binding alternative the niche of the organism does not comprehend or incorporate the effects of time, that which is only relevant in the niche of the Time-Binding organism, and Burroughs' logic is that the Time-Binding organism of humanity in its current form is therefore unable to exist in (Burroughsian) space.

Following Burroughs' appropriation of Korzybski's General Semantics, our relationship to meaning has two manifestations. On the one hand we experience meaning in a pseudo-Time-Binding sense through the disingenuous mediation of the Word, which is not only incapable of relating to reality but appears to be the direct result of a mechanism or virus put in place to obscure this relation. Those who are aware of this are the social outsiders of Burroughs' mythology who use a form of language whose inconsistency is implicit in its function. On the other hand there is the suggestion of a pseudo-Space-Binding sense of meaning bound to an ideal domain of liberation "literally unthinkable in verbal terms". As this ideal is, for Burroughs, beyond current human reach, it is through the bastardisation of Time-Binding language into "Jive Talk" (Burroughs 2003:133): fugitive

language that is employed by Burroughs' societal fugitives, that we may at least reveal the point from which the road to the ideal of Burroughsian space might be negotiated.

It is interesting also to note that this narrative, Burroughs' narrative from Time-Binding viruses to fugitive language to Burroughsian Space, is comparable to Harris' description of Burroughs' theoretical methodology, and as such leads to an ontology of production: "[Burroughs'] *failure* to apply or develop theory 'properly', [...] the *lack* of such a theorized context [enables] Burroughs' experimentalism in the first place." (Harris 2003:38 [original emphases])

If the exhibition of art is an activity that provides an engagement with some form of meaning-making process then, in terms of the Burroughs/Korzybski conception of meaning as I have articulated it above, a curatorial methodology arising from Burroughs would follow the engagements with language employed by Burroughs' fugitives. To this end, such a methodology would accept the fluid and subjective relationships between language and meaning as an integral part of the meaning-making process.

As such the engagement with meaning in the playing out of such a curatorial methodology would approach art works not as preconditions of an ideological framework, but as articles of practice or materials for the visitor. In accordance with Harris' observation that it is Burroughs' relationship to theory that allows his experimentalism, this would imply a methodology whose practice involved the same experimentalism in its articulation of artistic materials in a curatorial context. That is to say a curatorial methodology that, like the fugitive language of Burroughs' fugitives, is dictated by arbitrary relations that fluctuate through time and space. Such a methodology would, in Burroughs' terms, be employed to reveal indications of Burroughsian Space, liberation from the rigid control of language.

Translating this into more practical terms, such a methodology would imply the practice of curating as an attempt to provide an engagement with the meaning-making process that was not bound by the preconditions of a consistent set of principles defined by a pre-existing entity, whether that be the artist, the institution, some more abstract sociocultural system or, somewhat paradoxically, the curator themselves. Such an arbitrary arrangement of materials might appear detrimental to the meaning-making process, were it not for conceptualisations of this activity that allow for an approach to meaning that does not require meaning to have a formal framework of meaning-making. Whilst the very context of *exhibition* could be considered a formal framework in itself, there are of course

ways in which such frameworks can be destabilised. An example of such activity relevant to sound would be curator Daniele Balit's *Birdcage* project (2009-present), an "itinerant sound gallery"⁶ that appears at different locations not traditionally associated with galleries or institutions. According to Balit "Birdcage is a tool to trigger, re-define, and transform places through site-specific actions." (Website text accessed 17th September 2013).

A curatorial strategy as described engages with the meaning-making process that takes place in the niche of the visitor: the figure who ultimately determines the nature of the materials with which they engage as well as how they engage with them. Clarke's meaning-making of affordances and the relation of meaning to EVP via Raudive, both introduced in Chapter One, respond to such a strategy through their approach to meaning-making as a developing, ecological interaction with materials or collections of materials that might, through other systems of value-judgement, seem meaningless.

Burroughs relationship to the theories of Korzybski is one that presents a mythological narrative of disruptive approaches to language revealing an ideal of freedom, both of production and reception, which, I have argued, suggests particular emphases in curatorial activity. In Robert Brustein's short critique of the Beat Generation in *Horizon* magazine he criticises the countercultural activities of the Beat Generation as involving "hallucinations hailed as visions" and "childish irresponsibility" (Brustein 1958:38). My analysis of Burroughs' appropriation of Korzybski placed alongside my consideration of aural experience as a cognitive interaction bound up with hallucination as articulated in Chapter One, could be seen as countering Brustein's criticism by asserting that it is hallucinations through which reality is played out, and that irresponsibility towards forms such as language and society are appropriate responses to such a reality. Burroughs' project at this point announces an instability intrinsic to systems and their organisation, and a curatorial methodology that draws upon Burroughs may therefore adhere to similar fugitive, arbitrary relationships to form, content and meaning, as much in the materials it chooses to exhibit as to the environment in which, and the engagements through which, they may be determined to have been exhibited.

⁶ *About: BIRDCAGE*. Available from <<http://birdcagespace.com/index.php?/projects/about/>> 17th September 2013

2.3 Gysin, Cubism and the Cut-Ups

I have articulated above how Burroughs used Korzybski to challenge language, and suggestions of its relationship to meaning, with the aim to furthering the experimental nature of his own artistic output. The epicentre of this experimentalism could be regarded as the *cut-up technique*, probably the most well known and frequently referenced of his compositional techniques and the one from which many of his technical approaches in the tape experiments appear to derive. I will therefore review this experimental writing techniques developed with excommunicated surrealist painter Brion Gysin (1916-1986), and consider the relationship between the cut-up, meaning and the meaning-making process.

Gysin was an artist whose practice moved through painting, calligraphic works, film, concrete poetry, sound recording, writing, collage, photography and performance, some of which he worked on simultaneously, particularly during the late '60s and early '70s in the company of Burroughs and other collaborators (Hoptman 2010:59)

Prior to working with Gysin, Burroughs appears to have been relatively unfocused on the actual materials of his trade as a writer. His last work at that time was the “dilapidated and unreadable”(Morgan 1991:280) *Naked Lunch* manuscript, edited and ordered by Allen Ginsburg and Jack Kerouac to make it suitable for publication.

Burroughs' sudden and intense friendship with Gysin sees him address writing and the printed page in the way a painter engages with his physical medium. Gysin was convinced that writing was fifty years behind painting, referring specifically to the montage experiments and multiple perspectives offered by Cubism. With Gysin, Burroughs began to develop a complementary writing methodology.

In this section I discuss Cubism from an inferential perspective in relation to Burroughs' practice. I then consider the implications of Burroughs' most famous writing technique in accordance with meaning and a curatorial strategy developed from Burroughs and additionally in relation with the space/time dialectic that Burroughs, as I have articulated, developed around Korzybski's theory of General Semantics.

The montage style was to become a central tool in Burroughs' writing developed through this technique, discovered by Gysin, known as the cut-up. Simply put, the cut-up technique involved slicing a page of text into sections and rearranging the sections to form a new text. This was to evolve through experimentation into a variety of ways to alter linear

texts including folding of pages, reading the new configuration of words created by their new juxtaposition across the fold, and the technique of reading text columns, such as those found in newspapers, horizontally across multiple columns rather than reading them traditionally as distinct columns in their own right (for examples of the latter see Burroughs 1984).

Burroughs criticism has emphasised the link between Burroughs' cut-up technique and Tristan Tzara's Dada poetry, in which words are randomly extracted from a hat (Skerl 1985, Lydenberg 1987 and Longhi 2004 among others). The principal arguments hold both practically, in terms of the process of aleatory text manipulation and the goal of discovering the concrete form of language, and politically, in terms of the anti-establishment and anti-bourgeois attitude of Tzara and Burroughs' own sentiments (Friedberg 1979). It might appear therefore more convenient to link Burroughs' project with the Dadaist tradition, due to these practical and political similarities. However such comparison makes it easy to overlook one of the most important *phenomenological* connections between the cut-up and art historical movements, that of the cut-up's similarity to the Cubist movement in the visual arts, to which Burroughs explicitly and regularly refers when describing the cut-up technique to new audiences.

In one of Burroughs' more explanatory texts, *The Job* (Odier 1970), the cut-up appears as a guerrilla tool, like the routine form (see, for example, Hemmer 2009:69), for counteracting the control of language and the predicament of Time-Binding. It is a method of revealing words as they are; their concrete form (see Lydenberg 1987:137). In Cubism, I will argue, Burroughs saw a technique with the possibility of forcing words to better represent the simultaneity of cognitive experience, as he understood it. I shall demonstrate how the technique itself provided a system for replicating types of arbitrary association he recognised in the fugitive meaning of Jive Talk, as well as a technique that could, through use, suggest simultaneity of experience beyond the traditional linearity of the Time-Binding medium of text. Whilst acknowledging the associations between the cut-up technique and Dadaism, I will instead emphasise the debt owed to Cubism, more conspicuous in Burroughs' writing if less obvious due to the transference of media from image to text.

Writing in 1910 about the imminent public appearance of Cubism, Jean Metzinger announced the emergence of an art concerned with the "negation of axioms" and the "mixing, again and again, of the successive and the simultaneous" (Metzinger in Harrison 1992:178). Within art, Cubism documented the appearance of ruptures in the concept of

complete, separate forms, a disbanding of binaries in favour of the hybrid nature of things when seen from this new spatial perspective. Stephen Kern cites Paul Cézanne as responsible for first introducing “a truly heterogeneous space in a single canvas with multiple perspectives of the same subject.” (1983:141)

Although Kern argues that Cézanne used this technique for primarily compositional purposes Burroughs argues that the application of the cut-up technique to passages of text or texts, and methods developed through Cubism and montage, are closer to actual experience than traditionally perspectival representational painting and photography.

Burroughs writes:

Take a walk down a city street and put what you have just seen down on canvas.
You have seen half a person cut in two by a car, bits and pieces of street signs and advertisements, reflections from shop windows - a montage of fragments.

Burroughs 1986: 61

Burroughs describes a montage that is, like Metzinger’s Cubism, both successive and simultaneous. He recognises its debt to painting in *The Third Mind* in that it brought to writers, “the collage, which has been used by painters for fifty years.” (Burroughs in Burroughs and Gysin 1978). Burroughs’ time-based walk captures fragments that are moments or snap shots; a car does not pass in front of a person, but the eye of the walker registers only that moment when the car intersects the person.

In Cubism, as in Burroughs’ car-person, the de-composition of the object as separate entity contained the suggestion of the dissolution of any constant boundary between human and non-human. In Georges Braque’s *Homme à la guitare* (1911-1912) the man, his instrument and his surroundings are inseparable. There may be a suggestion of where the man is *not*, however there is no finite boundary between him, the guitar and the space they occupy. The space surrounding him influences his form and vice versa.

In the narrative space of the cut-up, the narrative of the text will jump back and forth mid sentence, creating a simultaneous past, present and future. Like Burroughs’ car-person, images and events in the cut-up become simultaneous, blended, as they are, in mid-expression.

Reading Burroughs against Marshall McLuhan, Anthony Enns refers to Burroughs’ cut-up and fold-in methods of writing as creating an “auditory space”. These techniques “provide connections that are not based on ‘logic or statement’, and [...] behave more like

the ‘sphere of simultaneous relations created by the act of hearing’” (Enns 2004:105). Harris’ observation on Burroughs’ experimentalism deriving from a lack of theoretical context is worth revisiting here. In Enns’ case, the experimentalism of the cut-up as a technique for providing material replicates, for Enns, the act of hearing. The word *bearing* appears to be specifically chosen and describes an act that does not presuppose the contextual guidance of *listening*. In both cases the experimentalism of the cut-up exists *because* of the lack of directional context.⁷

The cut-ups blend contexts, narrative styles and even writers, with letters, newspaper articles, routines, and published works by other writers, all melted together. This creates a textual landscape of simultaneous fact and fiction, where objective truth and the morality of language is impossible, with characters’ identities and truths in constant flux. Not only then does this practice replicate the fugitive characteristics of Burroughs’ Jive Talkers, but presents a narrative characterised by inconsistency replicating states of hallucination.

What the cut-ups appear to propose as a creative form when analysed alongside Cubism, is a collapsing of boundaries within the narrative between physical objects and the metaphysical objects of emotion, thought, hallucination, politics, commerce, myth, gender and desire. The conventions of reading the written text as a series of framed propositions replaced, as in the cut-up text, with an amalgamation of aleatory sources can appear disingenuous to the presence of the reader in the equation, however the project appears to be an assertion that it is just as disingenuous to purify (through division) the physical and the metaphysical at the risk of losing clarity and consistency in the work itself. As such the cut-up reads as an attempt to represent the messy, confusion of experience rather than cleanse it in order to make potential meanings more digestible and representations more transparent. Such activity is explicitly analogous to the Cubist project to represent the world as more than a series of two-dimensional objects.⁸

Burroughs uses different forms of writing from a variety of published and unpublished sources to pursue the cut-up method. The dislocation of the reader, and the awareness of plural writing styles and contexts within the cut-up texts, creates, in the cut-ups, multiple levels of reader who flow into and back out of the text. The cut-ups are intended to

⁷ This lack of directional context (or the presence of an alternative directional context) is particularly relevant in terms of Burroughs’ tape experiments as I shall demonstrate in Chapter Three, and how it can be used to more fully articulate audial art as a domain of practice.

⁸ Albeit one that does so in the two-dimensional form of painting

demonstrate the simultaneity of perception that Burroughs adopts from the Cubist montage, whilst disturbing the fixed identity of the text.

The problem of the cut-ups once they are fixed into a page to be read is that they still adhere to the linear progression of words. Although the cut-up theoretically treats space and time in the text as material that can be moved back and forth in the space and time of the text, the culture of reading provides a text that in practice is read in the same manner as any non-cut-up text. Skerl summarises the cut-up as:

...a way of exposing the word and image controls [that] “lock” us into conventional patterns of perceiving, thinking and speaking that determine our interactions with environment and society.

Skerl 1985:49

However by reinstating the hegemony of linear narrative through publication it could be suggested that this work is then undone. However Skerl adds that “for Burroughs [the cut-up] redefines the work of art as a *process* that occurs in collaboration with others and is not the sole property of artists,” (Skerl 1985:49-50, my emphasis) and it is in the object becoming process that the cut-up might manage to reinstate itself as a form that resists its own binding.

Burroughs stresses, in the first cut-up text to be published (Burroughs, Gysin, Beiles and Corso 1960), that the cut-up technique is understood best through its practice, and that everyone should attempt it. Everyone should, in Burroughs’ opinion, surgically dissect the word and its various uses, using the physical world. The cut-up proposes that its reader see printed text as a fragile and palpable object that can be torn apart and sculpted to better represent the sensorial experience of the person engaged in the cut-up process. When this is achieved, Burroughs argues, the practitioner may “break down the [...] automatic reactions to words [...] that enable [the control of] thought on a mass scale” (Burroughs in Odier 1970:51-52). In doing so Burroughs situates the cut-up text not at the point of readership, but at a point of creation, in which the reader of the text is active in restructuring both the encoded meaning of the symbolic and the medium within which this process is presented.

When Skerl identifies the cut-up as “the work of art as a *process* that occurs in collaboration with others” she is defining a meaning-making process that begs comparison with Nicolas Bourriaud’s Relational Art: “an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and

private symbolic space” (Bourriaud 2002:14 [original emphasis]). Burroughs’ project is less concerned with the idea of “inter-human relations” (Ibid. 43), and more concerned with a private search for autonomy towards personal freedom. His collaborations take place more with collaborators who share his values or are willing to adopt them for the purpose of experimentation. However Burroughs relinquished the cut-up as a discovery by both announcing it as method and suggesting that the cut-up works best understood when practiced not just when read. By opening out the field of the cut-up to other authors, in addition to publishing the results of his own cut-up texts, Burroughs lends the cut-up a social purpose.

A key similarity is in the definition of practices. Bourriaud’s championing of artists who attempt to remove the distance between the artist and audience might at first seem entirely compatible with Burroughs in terms of the latter’s activation of the reader as cut-up artist (for example) or in his desperate attempt to reach object of his attentions (including the reader). Skerl’s identification of Burroughs’ project as a process that occurs in collaboration might appear to support this. However, I find it interesting that Skerl’s phrasing defines Burroughs’ project as “a process that occurs in collaboration with others” rather than “a process of collaboration with others”. For Skerl the project materialises through an ecological interaction with others, perhaps an artist and/or audience, yet is not defined as that process as Bourriaud’s project appears to be.

A key difference between what I am proposing and the identifications of Bourriaud from his argument regarding collaboration can be found in his emphasis on communal meaning. Burroughs’ project derives more from a failure of communication (see Harris 1993 and 2003), a failure that marks communal meaning as essentially problematic. Although my project responds to this failure, which might be considered appropriate to Burroughs’ political interest in autonomy, it does so in the context of Maturana and Varela, thereby suggesting community as interacting autonomous elements. Thus the difference is not that there are no interactions between communal elements, but that, in my emphasis, the interactions do not provide any resolution of a work in the way Bourriaud describes.

Bourriaud defines part of this communal engagement as a question the visitor can pose that relates to the work in terms of its value: “does this work permit me to enter into dialogue? Could I exist, and how, in the space it defines?” (Bourriaud 2002:109). The aesthetics of this dialogue forms the heart of what makes the work function on Bourriaud’s

terms. An analogy could be drawn in terms of Raudive's experiments hitherto discussed, imagining Raudive as posing the same question to the noises emanating from his recordings. The difference lies in the definition of activities that Bourriaud is proposing and in my emphasis away from a re-definition of the art object and towards an engagement built out of affordances. Gibson's coining of the term "affordances" was intended as a replacement for "values", values being something that appears to offer a degree of objective qualification. Affordances depend upon ecological relationships in a way that is ultimately less objectively structured than Bourriaud's narrative, and more opportunistic and subjective.

Claire Bishop's critique of the 'laboratory' paradigm of curatorial approaches such as those expounded through discussions of relational aesthetics highlights a fundamental difference in the articulation of the experience between Bourriaud use of the term relational and my own. She writes:

[W]ork that is openended, interactive, and resistant to closure, often appearing to be "work-in-progress" rather than a completed object [...] seems to derive from a creative misreading of poststructuralist theory: rather than the interpretations of a work of art being open to continual reassessment, the work of art itself is argued to be in perpetual flux. [...] One could argue that in this context, project-based works-in-progress and artists-in-residence begin to dovetail with an "experience economy," the marketing strategy that seeks to replace goods and services with scripted and staged personal experiences. Yet what the viewer is supposed to garner from such an "experience" of creativity, which is essentially institutionalized studio activity, is often unclear.

Bishop 2004:52

Her observation of that which is "often unclear" presupposes an interaction with meaning and knowledge that is inherently problematic in terms of my project and yet not so in terms of Bourriaud's.

Bishop's analysis of Bourriaud's notion of relational aesthetic identifies this problem in terms of Bourriaud's articulation of specific works and how he shifts emphasis away from the details of the works' components and towards the structure of the work as a whole. For Bishop, Bourriaud appears to purify the messiness of the unresolved in Relational art by containing it through the identification of the value of the work as being ultimately about its structure: "For Bourriaud, the structure is the subject matter—and in this he is far more

formalist than he acknowledges” (Bishop 2004:64). Thus Bourriaud is still, Bishop suggests, seeking the elucidation of the viewer in the process, the direction of exchange is still one way, from artist (or curator) to audience. Whilst conceivably a problem with works that attempt legibility, it will be clear from both my articulation of audial art as a domain of obfuscation and hallucination, and from my forthcoming analysis of Burroughs’ own tape experiments, that such “unclear” creativity is bound up within the very demands of my strategic approach.⁹

At first this shift might appear slight, however the implications are considerable when considered from a curatorial perspective. Both highlight the site of artistic exchange, however Bourriaud’s strategy, in terms of curatorial proposition, retains the emphasis on the work as focus in the meaning-making process, even if that work is as fluid and open as he favours. My strategy, from a Burroughsian perspective, is (as articulated earlier) that it is the visitor, not the material of the work, which is the focus around which the machine (the technology of exhibition) must be built, and therefore the engagement is a site of active art-making that destabilises the passive acceptance of art as social experience. The design is not being played out but offered up. Ultimately Burroughs’ concerns favour the reworking of the work by the visitor. My discussions of the “niche” of Maturana and Varela articulate this difference between the shifts of focus in the articulation of meaning between the work and its audience. If, as they suggest, we accept that there may be interactions observed by an observer that, not being part of the visitor’s niche, is not a cognitive interaction but has been mistaken as such, and that there may be interactions the visitor makes at the site of exchange that the observer does not observe due to the elements of this interaction being outside of the niche of possible interactions of the observer, then Bourriaud’s definition of activity is flawed through its focus on a communicated event as the site of exchange. However if these ruptures in ideal principles of communication are accepted as a key feature of the process (in a manner I have articulated in relation to Raudive, for example) then the point at which Bourriaud announces the work to exist breaks down.

In her introduction to *Artificial Hells*, Bishop presents a critique of works by artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija who exemplify Bourriaud’s relational art, that might be relevant

⁹ See also my identification in Chapter Three of the Dianetics/psychoanalysis polarity suggested by Hubbard, Bishop’s requirement for clarity being perhaps analogous to the confirmation of meaning by the analyst as opposed to that of the auditor who functions more as a technician for an active subject (viewer).

when considering the relation of Bourriaud to a discussion of Burroughs: "One of the paradoxes of Tiravanija's practice is that in intensifying convivial relations for a small group of people [...] it produces greater exclusivity vis-à-vis the general public." (Bishop 2012:209) Burroughs' project operates on a more extreme exclusivity in that it frequently occurs as an esoteric relation between one or two individuals, whilst at the same time offering a more extreme inclusivity in that anyone, according to Burroughs, can make cut-ups or attempt these practices as a valid extension of their proposition. A more appropriate analogy might be found through activities that engages with reality in the manner of works as Tania Bruguera's art school project *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* (2002-9). Through works such as this Bruguera suggests an *arte útil* (useful art) that, as Bishop describes it "is both symbolic *and* useful [and] straddles the domains of art and social utility" (Bishop 2012:249). Burroughs has, like Bruguera, an "authorial identity as an artist" (Ibid.), and uses this for didactic purposes.

Burroughs' project is an attempt to negotiate a representation of reality that is fairer to perception than the traditional form of writing. What also happens however is that text essentially becomes material not just in the hands of the writer, but also in the hands of the reader whom Burroughs has called upon to perform the cut-ups for themselves. In a manner that is, to me, much over-looked in Burroughs criticism, the cut-ups demonstrate an engagement with words as physical objects that may be cut and folded, and which are presented, by Burroughs, to the reader as materials for this purpose. It is not enough to read the words as if they were reflective of traditional writing but to see them as examples of that which is possible. Thus the individual may configure from appropriate resources a "reality of perception" appropriate to their own niche and domain of interactions. Following this, the point of activation of the material is not in the reading of an existent cut-up text, but the point at which the material is faced with its cut-up version. As such, the cut-ups as published are examples, whereas it is the act of cutting-up that, like the Jive Talk of Burroughs' fugitives, is the tool for revealing the points at which the road to Burroughs' creative ideal, Burroughsian Space, can be negotiated.

With the cut-up, the established properties of text are destabilised in favour of the tangible experience of running a knife through paper and of fragments of pages being laid next to each other in a manner analogous to the physicality of the collage. In relating this to Burroughs' interest in Korzybski's Space-Binding paradigm, the individual components of

writing become extractable from their form and function, their cause and effect, and become spatial entities. As I have articulated above, as a part of their process they return to the traditional progression of linear time when they are read in the conventional manner, however this is not the primary state that makes the text exceptional. This state is the moment of the cut and splice, as if the noun *a cut-up text* would be read instead as a present participle, an incomplete, ongoing action. It could be said that there is a point when the material becomes fixed, but the cut-up as a proposal that involves its audience as an active participant simultaneously maintains the material nature of even the fixed text as a potential source of new practices.

Through ongoing manipulations of the materials, the cut-up demonstrates that the formal universe, represented in Burroughsian terms, does not contain only its own consistency but also the potential for its inconsistency: its cut-up form. The cut is the fold between two pages, the pre-recorded universe cut out of its inevitability of conditioned action and effect. In an ideal form it is material in perpetual cut-up, destabilised and restabilised to present an engagement that perpetually muddies a Burroughsian Time-Binding order of linear narrative, representing fugitive referents and a performance with meaning-making undergoing perpetual revolution.¹⁰

Thus far I have considered Burroughs' appropriation of Korzybski's ideas on language and a time/space dialectic, and his use of Gysin's cut-up technique. This analysis has identified relationships to meaning that are bound up with Burroughs' project to free himself from control, a prison of word and image that does not represent the simultaneity of relations as he sees it in the world around him. These activities are not an end but a means to an end. To properly articulate a Burroughsian relationship to meaning I need to investigate Burroughs' explicit pronouncements on the potential outcomes of such practices as the cut-up technique. The paradox should be apparent: my articulation of Burroughs' project is one that is in perpetual practice, an incomplete ongoing action, and at the same time that there appears an expressed outcome of such a project. As it is, Burroughs' discusses such an outcome as achievable ultimately only via the evolution of the human organism; the practices themselves are merely means by which one might reveal the point at which this outcome might be negotiated. This outcome he specifies as *space*.

¹⁰ I will compare this interpretation of the cut-ups to the time-based manifestation of sound in regards to Burroughs' cut-up activities with tape recorder in the second half of this chapter.

2.4 “nothing is true, everything is permitted” – From Space-Binding to Space

Burroughs’ semi-collaborative text *The Job* (1970) discusses many of the aforementioned concerns at length, including the potentials of the cut-up and the ideals of freedom of the individual from control. In *The Job* Burroughs describes the potential of L Ron Hubbard’s E-Meter, a device used in Hubbard’s self help dicta, Dianetics, and his religious system, Scientology, as a machine capable of allowing the skilled technician to overcome any instinctive reaction to “material presented” (Burroughs in Odier 1970:35). Thus Burroughs sees the E-Meter as a device for controlling reactions, a technique useful to obfuscate the mechanisms of a control machine, and thus to be able to look at a thing without imposed associations and histories obscuring it, and “*seeing it for what it is*” (Ibid. 37). Thus, for Burroughs, the E-Meter, like the cut-up before it, is a device for breaking down the automatic reactions to words used for control of the population, allowing the individual to experience reality as perceived.

Similarly Odier describes Burroughs’ interest in the tape-recorder as “a device for breaking down the barriers which surround consciousness” (Ibid. 13). In all cases Burroughs appears interested in devices that can manually manipulate representations of thought patterns (whether prose, truth statements or voice recordings respectively), and believes in the potential of these devices to aid the individual’s freedom from control, from “imposed thinking” (Ibid. 82), and from the barriers to interaction brought about by time, word and image.

I will examine the E-Meter and the tape recorder in depth in Chapter Three in my consideration of Burroughs’ relationship to sound; however their relationship to meaning-making is a key feature of their activity.

The Burroughsian ideal of liberation from preconceptions and preconditioned modes of understanding and behaviours is, for Burroughs, bound up with acts of creating effect through the use various techniques for the “dislocation and demolition” of “psychic areas and political obsessions” (Mottram 1977). For Burroughs, “what we call ‘art’ is magical in origin [in that] it was originally employed [...] to produce very definite effects” (Burroughs 1986:60), whilst the political and the historical are employed as material for disruption. It is the political and the historical that, according to Burroughs, are features of an effort to lock mankind into a Burroughsian Time-Binding state through the controlling, and obfuscating

mechanics of word, image and addiction, and that must be eradicated, through their disruption, to reveal roads to freedom. This process describes, in Burroughs, a domain of action in which, to employ one of Burroughs' maxims: "nothing is true, everything is permitted", a phrase that demands consideration in the context of elucidating a paradigm of Burroughsian meaning.

"Nothing is true, everything is permitted" is a phrase that recurs in Burroughs' writing from the 1960s onward. The origins of the phrase are disputed. Although the phrase is, by Burroughs, attributed as the last words of the legendary Persian figure of Hassan-I Sabbah, Barry Miles traces it to Betty Bouthoul's *Le Grand Maître Des Assassins* (1936) in which it appears as a chapter heading, not as the aforementioned last words (Miles 2000:204). It is likely to have arrived in Bouthoul from "Nichts ist wahr, Alles ist erlaubt" in Friedrich Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1891), and Miles suggests that the phrase *becomes* Hassan-I Sabbah's last words via a cut-up by either Gysin or Burroughs. In an interview with Tennessee Williams, Burroughs extrapolates in the phrase with "in other words, everything is permitted *because* nothing is true" (Burroughs 1977 [original emphasis]). As a motto of sorts, "nothing is true, everything is permitted" is perhaps an apt summary of the ideal of space that Burroughs was seeking to escape into. Where language and cause-and-effect could no longer be considered stable (or "true"), the potential of a completely liberated state of being in which an entity could be free to behave and exist as they wished, might, for Burroughs, conceivably be possible.

Such freedom of behaviour is reminiscent of the "childish irresponsibility" that, for Brustein, pervades the Beat Generation (Brustein 1958). Indeed Burroughs' literature is, from start to finish, full of language, tropes, narratives and characters copied from the pulp fiction genres that Burroughs read as a boy and continued to read through his adult life (as example see Murphy in Harris 2009). This included science fiction (which occupied centre stage of Burroughs' work during the period under discussion) and cops and robbers, but also the Wild West, the mummies of Ancient Egypt, pirates and explorers (such as in Burroughs 1983, Burroughs 1987 and Burroughs 1981 respectively). Also relevant are Burroughs' "Wild Boys", immortal adolescent boy hunters that manifest themselves as something of a sexually active cross between the Lost Boys of J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan and Wendy* (Barrie 1911) and the choir of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (Golding 1954). On the one hand it appears that Burroughs wants his reader to live in a state of childish irresponsibility, however at the same

time his characters are enacting definitively responsible roles, for Burroughs, in their combating of Burroughs' fantasies of control. Such a freedom, childish or otherwise, appears to coalesce in Burroughs' concept of space, an ideal of freedom that absorbs the pop cultural tropes of the intergalactic frontiers of science fiction narratives and the outlaw frontiers of the fugitives of Jack Black's Johnsons (Black 1926) as well as Burroughs' fascination with Korzybski's Space-Binding.

2.5 Burroughsian Space

In examining relationships to meaning and meaning-making processes in Burroughs, I find his ideal of space (as it appears in his writing in the late '60s and early '70s) is as close as one might get to the resolution or ultimate conclusion of a line of reasoning about the purpose of his experimental activities. *Space*, as Burroughs writes about it, appears to be the solution to many of Burroughs' concerns, a neat utopia into which to pour all of Burroughs' desires. For this reason I shall use this word space as a Burroughsian paradigm of an ideal state of existence to help articulate Burroughs' attitudes towards meaning.

Space in Burroughs is tied to an ultimate freedom. It is a state that offers emancipation from all pre-existing restraints, physical, mental and ideological. As such it is a zone of complete liberation, hence the title of this thesis: *Nothing Short of Complete Liberation: The Burroughsian Ideal of Space as Curatorial Strategy in Audial Art*.

The term space occurs frequently in Burroughs' writing of the 1960s and '70s, whether in an environmental context, a science fiction context, an abstract cognitive context, or purely as a symbol of creative freedom (see particularly Burroughs 1967 and Odier 1970). As I will demonstrate, his various uses of this term do not follow a clear-cut conception of what the space might be, but represent more of an amalgamation of fictional spaces, a *Body without Organs* (see Deleuze 1988) before or after the codification of existence, and one which is similarly unattainable: "You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit." (Ibid.150). Like the Body without Organs Burroughs' space is a fantasy of liberation from the codifying effects of existence, and therefore it is not surprising that it is the language of the fugitives through which, Burroughs suggests, its point of negotiation may be revealed. Nevertheless as an ideal in Burroughs' magical universe, space is directly tied to meaning and one of the central themes of both Burroughs'

methodology and the mythology that he constructs. I suggest that what I define as Burroughsian Space encapsulates what, for Burroughs, is the goal to which his activity is directed and therefore what is of primary importance in the articulation of engagement with the meaning-making process from a Burroughsian perspective.

The following sections will look at space, as it appears referenced in Burroughs' literature and those of his critics. Relating space to the meaning-making process and working towards my articulation of a curatorial strategy concerned with sound in Burroughs' project in the following chapter.

2.5.1 Space in Burroughs' Literature

As already suggested, Burroughs considered space as a creative goal, a freedom from constraints and conditions behaviours. In essence the ideal of space allowed Burroughs to conceptualise a domain in which he had complete liberation to do what he wanted. This definition can be deduced from the closest thing Burroughs has to a significant explanatory text in which he discusses space from the period of his tape recorder experiments, *The Job* (Odier 1970), and part of his speech at the 1978 Nova Convention at the Entermedia Theatre in New York City.

Prior to analysing the appearance of space in these sources it is necessary to establish the status of *The Job* and the context of the speech, as the former can be read as a particularly deceptive piece of literature, verging on propaganda, whilst the latter context is integral to my argument for the significance of Burroughsian Space within his thinking.

The Job, not unlike many of Burroughs' works from the period, appears in subtly different editions. Originally published in French translation in 1969, *The Job* first appears in English in 1970 entitled *The Job: Interview with William Burroughs* under the authorship of Daniel Odier. This attribution however is misleading. Although the text is structured around a series of interviews with Burroughs by the French journalist Odier, it becomes evident whilst reading that the "interview" of the title (or "interviews" in later editions) frequently break into long monologues whose construction come more from the point of view of fictional narrative or pseudo-scientific essay than from interviews. The interviewer and interviewee briefly withdraw to be replaced by the chapter heading, and although these

shifts may not surprise readers of Burroughs' previous novels, *The Job* is advertised as "interview" and thus inhabits the supposedly factual realm of journalism.

As a selection of interviews originally cited as being the work of Odier it is a reasonable assumption to make that the book is a work of non-fiction, however Sylvère Lotringer, in his introduction to *Burroughs Live: The Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs 1960-1997*, claims that the interview between Odier and Burroughs was "adapted – or reappropriated – by Burroughs" into *The Job* (Lotringer 2001:15). Thus, regardless of the title, the final text is edited by the interviewee thereby refuting any editorial impartiality. This is indicative of Burroughs the manipulator of personae, and it is therefore essential to read the text as manifesto, a text ostensibly written both about and by its author. Odier appears in the text merely to set-up ideas and routines¹¹ that can then be explored by Burroughs without being held accountable to the traditions of the interview. In effect Burroughs has given himself the last word and edited in scenes that did not occur, simultaneously demonstrating the quandary that *any* interview be considered from a non-fictional perspective. In essence then it becomes Burroughs' own work, advertised under the guise of an objective interview.

The 1984 edition, published by Calder, recognises Burroughs as author, although this is a decision that may be due as much to Burroughs having been, by that time, a more accepted literary figure than to a faithful representation of authorship. My principle motive for emphasising this discrepancy is due to fact that the term space appears, unattributed, in *The Job's* preface. As the hand of Burroughs is so evidently in place throughout the organisation of this text, the unattributed preface is arguably the work of Burroughs rather than Odier; despite the guise of journalist objectivity, it remains descriptive of Burroughs' intention for the forthcoming text. The preface includes a reference to the first person, and the book itself is uncertain in its attribution to Burroughs or to Odier. However as the preface contains phrases such as "To travel in space you must leave the old verbal garbage behind", which crop up again in the book as pronouncements by Burroughs (Burroughs in Odier 1970:191) the preface can be assumed to be written by Burroughs. Additionally, Burroughs' speech in the Nova Convention, as will become evident, is strikingly similar to the aforementioned preface. In this way it occupies a dubious position with regard to the

¹¹ I shall discuss routines in Chapter Three, however for an in-depth consideration of the term "routine" in Burroughs see Harris 2003

ratification of its own relationship to meaning. As an explanatory text it first assumes the supposition of journalistic objectivity. Once the (albeit thin) disguise is removed its relationship to meaning becomes entirely encapsulated within Burroughs' mythology.

Why is this literalism relevant to the context of Burroughs discussing space? As the introduction of a comparatively clear concept of creative aspiration (space) in Burroughs' writing appears here in most detailed, pragmatic form it might be useful to determine the context of how Burroughs discusses the term. In some ways *The Job* could be read as a chance for Burroughs to present an intellectual argument for his production thus far.

The implication of this text being not as straightforward as a series of interviews edited by the interviewer is that it becomes either a fictional work entirely or a manifesto – a piece of propaganda. The lack of attribution gives the opening statement on space an atmosphere of mythic certainty. It suggests the passage has been selected by a biographer or journalist as a grand statement, with the subsequent implication of being selected with a degree of journalistic objectivity. As preface it also presents this as a context to which the subsequent material can be related.

Thus the description of space in this preface comes to the reader from a creative, pseudo-scientific domain. This is key as it sets up space as an idea that may not exist in any kind of empirical reality but may exist purely to play a role in Burroughs' mythological, experimentalist system.

Having established the status of the individual sources I quote from both below. *The Job* begins with a description of space, in an astronomical context, as “the new frontier” and suggests that space exploration is being withheld:

The last frontier is being closed to youth. However there are many roads to space. To achieve complete freedom from past conditioning is to be in space. Techniques exist for achieving such freedom. These techniques are being concealed and withheld. In *The Job* I consider techniques for discovery.

Burroughs in Odier 1970:7

The implication of the metaphor is that the space written about in *The Job* is not just the outer space of the universe, but is analogous to the achievement of “complete freedom from past conditioning”.

This section also presents an idea of a “frontier” as the point from which the ideal of space is to be negotiated. As articulated in relation to space, the term frontier can also be

read as allegorical and as part of a Burroughsian mythology, not as an actual frontier geopolitical, historical, physical or otherwise. The frontier therefore can be read as the point of operation in approaching space, which, in a creative context, can be articulated along the lines of Burroughs' system as the arena of practice with space being the ideal aspiration of that practice. As I have already mentioned, putting artistic practice in the language of pulp science fiction comics and Wild West novels is not something alien to Burroughs' work, it creates a rhetorical backdrop for adolescent fantasies of autonomy and investigation: pulp characters discovering new ways of living outside of the codifying systems of society.

In contrast to the preface of *The Job*, the Nova address is even more explicit about the science-fiction context of the metaphor. It brings in an analogy with "early mariners", another common setting for the pulp adventure stories that Burroughs would have grown up with in early 20th Century America. The importance of the Nova Convention speech in terms of Burroughs' work is in the purpose of the convention itself, which, according to Ted Morgan, was instigated as a "homage to Burroughs" then adapted as a political tool to gather the "counterculture tribe [and] enshrine Burroughs as its leader" (Morgan 1991:547). Thus the convention was an opportunity to summarise Burroughs' thinking and influence to that point, and his speech an opportunity for Burroughs to highlight important aspects of his project. It is interesting therefore to note the similarities in both *The Job*'s preface and the Nova Convention speech being, as they are, the introduction to a major explanatory text by Burroughs on the one hand, and a political address to potential followers on the other. The address includes the following announcement:

People have asked me what the whole Nova Convention is about, and this is what it is about in very few words. This is the space age and we are here to go. However the space program has been restricted so far to a mediocre elite who, at great expense, have gone to the moon in an aqualung. Now they're not really looking for space, they are looking for more time. [...] And as we leave the aqualung of time we may step into an epic comparable to the days when the early mariners set out to explore an unknown world. Only those who are willing to leave everything they have ever known in time need apply.

Transcribed from 'What the Nova Convention is About', *The Nova Convention* LP
(1979)

The Nova address reprises the restricted outer space of the aqualung wielding elite, but develops the concept of space to a point in which it becomes the antonym of “time”. Indeed “time” is analogised here in as a man-made device that retains the connection of the explorer to his homeland at odds with the complete freedom for Burroughs’ space. Therefore we have a Burroughsian Space that represents freedom (more specifically freedom from the past) and a space that is not just different from, but appears to be entirely separate from, time. “Only those who are willing to leave everything they have ever known in time need apply.” (Ibid.) Thus Burroughsian Space implies some kind of a space of possibilities that exists without, or in ignorance of the effects of, temporal progression and, by association, temporal causality. As I have already articulated, time and space as a dialectic in Burroughs owes much to Korzybski’s project. As much as space can be read as a quasi-mythical ideal, time is associated, for Burroughs, as bound up with the concepts of conditioned action, cause and effect and the word/image prison of Burroughsian Time-Binding.

Space in the Nova address, the “unknown world”, like the preface from *The Job* is attached by Burroughs to the concept of a space of exploration and the frontier. The analogy thus evokes the naïve ideals of adventure stories: self-sufficiency, autonomy, the testing of physical and mental limits, and the potential for starting anew all through the obliteration of previous systems and modes of behaviour. These boyhood¹² adventure stories would be explicitly picked up and expounded upon by Burroughs later on in the trilogy *Cities of the Red Night* (Burroughs 1981), *Place of Dead Roads* (Burroughs 1983) and *The Western Lands* (Burroughs 1987) which revised stories about explorers and swashbuckling pirates, cowboys, and Ancient Egypt respectively. In each case, the youths of Burroughs’ attention seek freedom.

What of the methods by which Burroughs suggests we achieve this freedom? The opening statement of *The Job*, and indeed also the closing statement of the Nova Convention speech, both quote the adage “It is necessary to travel. It is not necessary to live.” (Burroughs in Odier: 1970:7). Placed either side of statements about space, in effect bookending the period from *The Job* to the Nova Convention, opening Burroughs’ manifesto

¹² The stories of Burroughs’ youth were decidedly gendered. Burroughs’ own adaptation of these stories emphasised this, containing very few female characters at all.

and closing his rally, it seems of relevance to the defining of this space of complete liberation.

The quotation ‘Navigare necesse es[t]. Vivare no[n] es[t] necesse’, unattributed in *The Job*, appears to come from Plutarch who attributes it to the Ancient Roman politician Pompey the Great (106 BC – 48 BC). The statement, from a Latin edition of Plutarch’s *The Fall of the Roman Republic, Six Lives by Plutarch*, is alternatively translated as “We have to sail, we do not have to live.” (Plutarch 1954). The original context sees Pompey, faced with a fierce storm, rousing his reluctant sea captains to set sail and carry grain with him to Italy.

In the preface to *The Job*, Burroughs maintains that the quotation inspired “the early navigators when [faced with] the vast frontier of unknown seas [...] in the fifteenth century” (Burroughs in Odier 1970:7) from when, incidentally, the Latin translation is thought to originate. Having restored the quotation to its source, Burroughs’ use of the term becomes clearer. Travel is necessary to achieve a hypothetical goal, be that either of carrying grain to Italy for Pompey, or for Burroughs reaching space. Death, for both Pompey and Burroughs, is an unavoidable risk in undertaking such an endeavour. The opening passage of *The Job* announces the risk of his project, whilst insisting on the necessity of the undertaking. Remaining in time is remaining in a prison of cause-effect, addiction and control. The key therefore, is the necessity of travel. “To travel in space [...] you must learn to see what is in front of you with no preconceptions” (Burroughs in Odier 1970:191-192), which is to say without a pre-conditioning influencing one’s experiences. This mantra of exploration over survival is, once again highly indicative of adventure stories for boys in which astronauts and adventurers seek new lands regardless of the dangers such activities may pose. What is revealing about this philosophy is as much about its similarity to pulp fiction, which ties a nostalgic Burroughs to a time and a place, as it is about Burroughs’ biography, leaving the environment of his adolescence.

In her book *William S. Burroughs* Skerl identifies the importance of travel in the development of Burroughs’ identity as an author: “[Burroughs] travels and changes in residence for the past twenty-five years have been in response to his needs and opportunities as a writer” (Skerl 1985:13). This identity as a writer, an identity of travel and the epistolary (see Harris 2003), according to Skerl, replaces Burroughs’ former identity as a drug addict.¹³

¹³ Although she acknowledges that one of the reasons Burroughs moved to Morocco was “the availability of morphine” (Skerl 1985:14)

It is therefore not a major stretch of the imagination to suggest that had Burroughs not embraced travel he might have ended up in the fate of many opiate addicts. Thus travel may be a necessity as it allowed him to escape the fate of addiction. However when considered alongside Burroughs' obsession with pulp adventure stories it could also be suggested that travel was Burroughs' method of romanticising his own story.

So for Burroughs death, the non-necessity of living, takes on an allegorical appearance, the same as space and the frontier. *The Job*, as a work of metafiction, plays with ideals that appear to come directly from childish desires – perhaps unsurprisingly when the key characters in Burroughs books from the late '60s onwards are adolescent boys.

2.5.2 Some Other Manifestations of Burroughsian Space

Jennie Skerl, whilst demonstrating the positive principles she finds in Burroughs' work of the late '60s,¹⁴ identifies space amongst these principles:

Immunization, apomorphine,¹⁵ silence, cutups/juxtaposition/field,
randomness/spontaneity, regulation/autonomy/liberation, space, chaos, innovation,
disintegration, merger, improvisation.

and likewise finds "time" amongst their antitheses:

Virus is equated with addiction, and addiction equals word, equals linearity, equals
cause-effect, equals control, equals reality/fact, equals time, equals order, equals
repetition, equals form, equals boundaries, equals convention.

Skerl 1985:65

Like Skerl, The 'Cybernetic Culture Research Unit' (Ccru 2004:274-291) identify a time-space dialectic in their discussion of space in Burroughs in their essay 'Limurian Time War' from *Retaking the Universe: William S. Burroughs in the Age of Globalization*. Their essay, in a manner comparable to the pseudo-documentation of *The Job*, is written as a fictional narrative surrounding the mysterious figure of William Kaye, presumably the invention of the author(s). The methodology of the essay reflects Burroughs' practice of weaving discourse into the conventions of science fiction and crime stories.

¹⁴ Specifically *Nova Express* (Burroughs 1964).

¹⁵ Apomorphine: a controversial cure for opiate addiction advocated by Burroughs.

Despite the irregular structure of the essay there appears an explicit interpretation of space from Burroughs. Choosing to capitalise Space, the author(s) observe in the essay that Burroughs meant his writing techniques to “unbind time” and “open up Space” (Ibid. 282). They describe space in Burroughs:

[...] not as empirical extension, still less a transcendental given, but in the most abstract sense, as the zone of unbound potentialities lying beyond the purview of the [One God Universe’s] already written.

Ibid.

According to Burroughs’ conceptualisation of a One God Universe, the universe is run by a nefarious demiurge, “the God of Arbitrary Power and Restraint, Of Prison and Pressure” (in Burroughs and Gysin 1978:16). The One God Universe is, for Burroughs, the theological system of the world of control and of time in which events are pre-recorded. The Ccru suggest that Burroughs’ space is invisible to this universe and may be reached via the unbinding of time that enables the One God Universe to govern reality, through the forces of power, restraint, imprisonment and pressure.

The Ccru’s “Limurian Time War” reliance on traditions of conflict and subterfuge in fiction for the structure of the essay evokes an abstract conflict that is internal to the reader through the nature of reading fiction. Eric Mottram’s *William Burroughs: The Algebra of Need* (Mottram 1977) attempts to establish Burroughs’ literature amongst the “games with space and time” of James Joyce, Gertrude Stein and Marcel Proust and describes Burroughs as “a cosmonaut of inner space” (Ibid. 13-14). Both of these sources imply an inner conflict or game. This interpretation of activity in Burroughs reprises the earlier implication of the space metaphor in *The Job*. *The Job*, as quoted previously, refers not just to the outer space of the universe but, in being analogous to the achievement of “complete freedom from past conditioning”, is an activity describing the individual’s interaction with themselves in relation to their past conditioning. The Ccru present us with an essay as a fiction. The “Space” they describe announces for me its proximity to Burroughsian Space through the process of its fictionalisation. It is internal, unwritten and thus predictive of an individual fantasy of freedom from conditioning, and as such a hypothetical ideal.

Other critics have chosen to emphasise the sexual politics of Burroughs’ conflicts, evident in the “cool dads” and “better half” of the opening to *The Job*. Cary Nelson’s essay ‘The End of the Body: Radical Space in Burroughs’ (1973) describes Burroughs’

interpretation of the human as a “hermaphroditic” body locked in “a war of sex and pain” by the “flesh language of time.” (Ibid. 124) Nelson’s text demonstrates Burroughs’ development of time, in contrast to space, into a war of the sexes occurring in every human being. Jamie Russell, who has written persuasively on the sexual politics and the great sex war in Burroughs, considers Burroughs to occupy a position favouring “the establishment of a masculine-focused gay identity” which serves to “transgress” the active/passive hierarchy of the “heterosexual matrix” (Russell 2001:179). Russell considers an ideal in which active and passive positions are not fixed but “the relation between participants is fluid” (Ibid.). This reveals an ideal unbound by the language of time in which interactions are orgiastic rather than bound by social, sexual or hierarchical conventions imposed by time (historical precedent) and word (definition and distinction), much like Deleuze’s *Body without Organs*.

To return to Nelson’s reading of Burroughs, Nelson views Burroughs’ writing as an attempt to make “*this* instant a spatial experience of all time [...] in which the self can no longer maintain his sense of temporal continuity” (1973:129-130 [original emphasis]). Nelson suggests that Burroughs’ human perceives external “objects” as “images” linked to the heterosexual pleasure-pain conflict of time and language. Therefore objects, through the matrix of time/language, become distant by their implication as images. As Burroughs writes in *The Job*, “You must learn to see what is in front of you with no preconceptions.” (Burroughs in Odier 1970:191-192) whereas, as Burroughs understands from Korzybski, in the time of Burroughsian Time-Binding, objects have no physicality and no tangible presence but are merely symbolic referents. Nelson summarises Burroughs’ use of the random word juxtapositions of the cut-up method as an attempt to reveal the trap of language, thereby bringing it to an end. Thus, like Skerl and the Ccru, Nelson identifies the principle that, for Burroughs, temporal experience (as an analogy of the Time-Binding prison of conditioned action) is to be disrupted, or eliminated, in favour of the Burroughsian Space-Binding cognitive interaction enjoyed by those inhabiting the magical universe without such conditions.

Whatever the cause or subject of the conflicts and games identified by Burroughs’ critics, they are endemic of struggles with conditioned behaviour. Whether language, time and history, elite power-mongers or sexual politics are to blame, the implication of Burroughs’ space as “freedom from past conditioning” and as an ideal negotiated through experimentalism is that these causes or subjects can be eradicated with modes of behaviour

necessitated by the engagement with the “unknown world” as an environment of adolescent fantasy.

To reiterate, Burroughs’ experimentalism is bound within a lack of theoretical context (Harris 2003), which makes his appropriation of sources pseudoscientific. Through this I have identified the following relationships to meaning: Firstly a Burroughsian relationship to meaning must navigate a relationship to language with connections to Korzybski’s General Semantics and the fugitive Jive Talk glossary of his social outsiders. Secondly, the purpose of much of Burroughs’ activity in the period researched involves attempts to liberate the individual from conditioned action. Thirdly, the activities undertaken in regard to point one and to the objective of point two involve techniques (stemming from the cut-up) both as an activity for perpetual creativity and, for Burroughs, produce interactions closer to the act of cognitive perception. Finally these activities revolve around an ideal of liberation that Burroughs referred to as space and which was bound up with adolescent fantasies and pulp narratives. I will now place this space, bound up with male fantasies, next to other discourses on space: literary, social and political, to tease out the differences and similarities to engage his space with new meanings.

In *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*, David Bell and Gill Valentine introduce a reading of space as sexed and sexualised. They open with reference to an advertisement for erotic telephone lines from *Boyz*, a free London gay magazine launched in the early '90s. It is worth briefly addressing this sexualised reading of geographic space, as the link between space and freedom in Burroughs might have some profound implications when contemplating similar spaces at the time Burroughs' was formulating his theories of a hypothetical space of liberation. If we describe Burroughs as a character of narcotic and sexual desire, as he indeed describes his obsessions in the first two of his novels *Junky* and *Queer*, then this is not least due to Burroughs' arrival in London incorporating alternative geographies of junkies and of Dilly boys the latter also illicit prior to the legalisation of homosexuality in the Sexual Offences Act 1967.

Burroughs' space as presented in *The Job* and the Nova address obliterates the structures of the heterosexual matrix as a condition of travel in space: "To travel in space you must leave the old verbal garbage behind: God talk, country talk, mother talk, love talk, party talk" (Burroughs in Odier 1970:7). At the same time he performs (see McDowell in Bell and Valentine 1995:75-95) the alienated masculine banker with his regulation hat and

suit, thereby maintaining the disguise of social order. Burroughs' environment at this time is an alternative geography planned out through physical need, especially in terms of sex and drugs, both of which had, by this point, come to represent his persona as a writer. In such a London navigation does not follow the published routes.

Jon Binnie, in his essay 'Trading Places: Consumption, Sexuality and the Production of Queer Space' quotes Richard Sennet observation of the spaces of alternative lifestyles of mid-1920 New York as "a city of differences and of fragments of life that do not connect: in such a city the obsessed are set free" (Bell and Valentine 1995:184). This "passing reference" resonates with Burroughsian space as I articulated it in this thesis, in terms of the cut-up theory's articulation of perception as "a montage of fragments" (Burroughs 1986:61). However it also resonates through this lack of connection having an interesting parallel with Burroughs' desire to disconnect and/or silence the talk of the dominant cultural order in relation to space as a space of freedom for those governed by obsessions.

When Burroughs' characterised obsessions of illicit sex and drug use (the latter for which he originally came to London seeking a cure) are compared with the "talk" categories of God, country, mother, love and party, can it be suggested that Burroughs' navigation comes from a silence of the dominant heterosexual matrix or is it that where the matrix is silent is in fact the points of contact for Burroughs' needs? That is to say that perhaps Burroughs is capable of doing away with the dominant "talk" due to its unwillingness to discuss the means to attain his requirements of drugs and sex, and/or the dominant's inaccuracy when it does. Thus where there is silence there may be drugs and/or sex and therefore navigation by silence becomes possible. If this is the case then Burroughsian space is as much a practical guide for Burroughs for uncovering spaces of transaction and the fulfillment of affordances as it is an ideal concept of creative liberation. Such a concept of space relates back to Burroughs' activity as a kind of social utility, a means to attain necessary conditions for a liberated existence.

José Muñoz's configuration of queer utopia in *Cruising Utopia* (2009) suggests an ideal comparable to that imagined by Burroughs. Muñoz's emphasis on a queer futurity often resembles Burroughsian space in its presentation of stages of "radical impossibility" through which potentials might be performed (ibid. 139). The impossibility of the science fiction of Burroughs' space in which an evolved, liberated youth exists without need for the aqualung, presents a utopia of creative potentials that ignores the presence and effects of time. The

queer space of Muñoz evokes a horizon as a point from which one can interrupt or step out of a "the temporal stranglehold [...] of straight time" (ibid. 32) very much in the manner that Burroughs' frontiers offer points at which the negotiation of space becomes available.

Burroughs' definition of time as part of a control monopoly suggests he too sees it as part of the heterosexual matrix, and part of the system that is to be replaced, in Burroughs' case, with one derived from the fugitive. Perhaps Burroughs' fugitives are merely stand-ins for a queerness that yet allows Burroughs to retain his resistance to the feminine (see Russell 2001).

For Muñoz "queerness as utopian formation is a formation based on an economy of desire and desiring [and as such is] always directed at that thing that is not yet here" (Muñoz 2009:26). Likewise Burroughs' constructing of his identity as a creative, first through the epistolary directed at absent friends (see Harris 1993 and Harris 2003) and then through the cutting up of the words of absent authors, is bound up in the desire for absence. Ultimately Burroughsian space itself as an ideal unreachable in our present state is the ultimate reflection of this utopian absence.

The absence in Burroughs is also persuasive as a property of freedom/liberation in its potential application to the relationship between space and the power of the gaze described by Louis Marin in his essay 'Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present' (Marin 1993).

Marin introduces the essay by describing a constitution of space through actual and virtual gazes in relation to the Sears Tower, suggesting how the experience of visiting the tower is one that presents "a simulacrum of fullness", a space that is packaged, defined and "possessed" (ibid. 399). Marin then invokes the panopticon to describe how this visitor is simultaneously an object in relation to this gaze. As such Marin suggests a homogenised space of the American "utopian drive", and of domination and dominating that is relevant to Burroughs. As a satirist, Burroughs' amplification of the kinds of impulses that Marin describes are bound up with an assumption of critique of such impulses. However, in Burroughs' evocation of his ideal of space the satire is not apparent.

Marin's article posits the question in which direction from the "strange frontier" (ibid. 408) separating the terms horizon (the infinite) and utopia (universality) does Burroughsian space belong? On the one hand the kind of queer utopias that emerge after *The Job* (those described in *Cities of the Read Night*, for example) suggest universality, albeit of a perpetually revolutionary sort, whilst the outer space paradigm that both precedes and is

articulated within it suggests the infinite. Perhaps Burroughs' reining in of the experimentalism of the cut-ups and tape experiments emerge at the same time that the Burroughsian ideal of space drifts across the frontier from horizon to utopia? If so, the ease at which it does this, and indicators of homogeneity that are apparent in *The Job*, as manifesto for a new state of being, are worth considering. In addition to this, Marin's description of "utopia as a process" that displaces, "by the practice of its travels, all representation, secretly duplicating any kind of real geographical voyage and any kind of historical and temporal change" (ibid.) in a manner that sounds consistent with the escape from image control and causality that Burroughs is advocating in his space argument.

How does such a space, constituted as a direct reaction to the absence of others, and seemingly affiliated with utopian impulses relate to its countercultural purpose as described by Burroughs? Of course, the nature of Burroughsian space as a homogenous utopia derives in part from its intention as a panacea. It is only through Burroughs presenting a space that solves his personal grievances as a space that is also the solution to all of human imprisonment and control that the consideration of a Burroughsian space becomes possible. Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre 1991) offers a potential criticism of this idealistic utopia, albeit perhaps a definition of space and spatiality as something more tangible (or related to tangibility) than the one that Burroughs appears to be proposing.

In the sense that Burroughsian space appears directed at a space without either/or definitions, he appears to be suggesting a space of homogeneity. This seems to follow Lefebvre's argument of the kind of abstract spaces that might be suggested by capitalism, spaces that embrace homogeneity rather than accommodate a multi-cultural, representational diversity. Although Burroughs seeks to escape the dominant cultural order and do away with its control through the structures of the heterosexual matrix, his fugitive analogies maintain certain traits that might be read as exclusive of otherness through their homogeneity. It is easy to read Burroughs' project on the one hand as the accepting of difference through the obliteration of the language that creates such divisions, however (like Hubbard before him) there is also the spectre of a utopia born out of a more colonial ubiquity that heralds a furtherance of the capitalist project.

Foucault is more lenient in relation to analogies of utopian space. Introducing a post-Galilean space in 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', Foucault defines contemporary space as taking "the form of relations among sites" (Foucault 1967:421).

Burroughs' spaces are beyond frontiers, unreachable quasi-sites that appear only in terms of roads towards them rather than as spaces in and of themselves. In that sense Burroughsian space is not only a space of utopian futurity as described above, but a perpetual relation rather than a site itself.

Burroughs has described that negotiating the road to space might come through the kinds of activities (such as the tape experiments and cut-ups) that he describes in texts like *The Job*. That is to say that the technologies that Burroughs develops through montage, paranoid experimentalism and Dianetics are, through being technologies-as-extension-of-the-nervous-system, tools for revealing relations to Burroughs' utopia. Foucault offers us a means to unpack such a relation to utopian spaces through his discussion of heterotopias.

To describe the relationship between heterotopias and utopias Foucault uses the metaphorical object of the mirror. The mirror is appropriate for Burroughs' understanding of his use of tape machines as a means of self-analysis and repair. Foucault writes:

The mirror is [...] a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. [The mirror] makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.

Foucault (Ibid. 423)

As such the mirror, for Foucault, functions as both a realisation of the self (as connected) in relation to environment, whilst also presenting a relation to a utopia. This gives a clear conceptualisation of Burroughsian space in terms of his technologies of production, potential and the futurity of the perpetual project. Foucault's heterotopias are then analogous to Burroughs' tape machines in the way that, for Burroughs, the tape record encloses and reorders key psychic and biological material and, as in Foucault's mirror analogy, it shapes the cognitive interactions we might have with a perception of self and with creative potentials.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced Burroughs through the context of how his literary endeavours engage with a process of meaning-making. Following Harris, I have positioned Burroughs' practice first and foremost as an experimentalist engagement with ideas and materials. I have demonstrated how this experimentalism has allowed Burroughs to adapt a space/time dialectic from the General Semantics of Korzybski and present it within his mythology as an ideal Burroughsian Space.

Burroughsian Space is a space of liberation and freedom from conditioned action. As such Burroughs' project is positioned as a methodology by which such freedom might be attained. Such a product of experimental activities has a powerful contextualising effect on Burroughs' practice. Burroughs is not trying to communicate meaning but aims to engineer his own freedom and, through didactic and collaborative addenda to his experiments,¹⁶ prompt others to do the same.

Cross-referencing this with my reading of the Ccru's essay 'Limurian Time War' evokes the implication of an extended fictional narrative beyond the narrative supplied to the reader. In essence this proposes an engagement with narrative that suggests unbounded potentials of interpretation and imagination. Following this Burroughs' project could, on the one hand be read as a literal strive for freedom, and on the other a metaphorical articulation of potential freedoms through creative engagement.

In Chapter Three I examine Burroughs' interest in sound, the voice and its importance to his production. I investigate the emergence of Burroughs' from the shifting narratives of text to concrete sonic interventions in the ambient and the sensorial. My conclusions above present an interesting starting point in that, in linking Burroughs' writing to his tape experiments, they also suggest Burroughs' production in sound as a tool to force change from causality and the tape recorder as a vehicle for liberation.

Recording captures sounds both in the foreground and background of the recorded field and the unwanted alongside the deliberate. My examination of approaches to meaning-making in Burroughs provides a background for this shift from the specificity of text to the more ambiguous impressions of recorded sound.

¹⁶ As I shall clarify in Chapter Three

3 The Tape Experiments: Sound in Burroughs' Work and Thought

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents research into Burroughs' tape experiments and the relationship of sound to his written work. In Chapter One I contextualised various positions relating to exhibition making: that of the curator-as-practitioner and my interest in sound and the meaning-making process from an ecological perspective. In Chapter Two I looked at how meaning-making might be understood from a Burroughsian perspective, considering Burroughs' cut-up technique and ideal of space. These preceding chapters form the background of the curatorial strategy that I establish through this present chapter.

I consider Burroughs' resonance in music and the physicality of Burroughs' voice both as extraordinary factors in his cultural significance. I shall describe the nature of both, and then undertake detailed reviews of specific tape experiments by Burroughs in an attempt to unpack meaning both from their contents and from the conditions of their making. I demonstrate how the tape experiments are significant examples of Burroughs' cultural production, and how they both clarify and complicate a particularly Burroughsian attitude to the meaning-making process. I then look at how, for Burroughs, the tape recorder represents an important analogy to the E-meter of Hubbard's Dianetics and Scientology, and Burroughs' position that the experiments themselves are not artistic propositions. Such analysis will have considerable implications for the application of the curatorial strategy to the exhibition in Chapter Four.

3.0.1 Burroughs' Resonance in Music

Burroughs openly admits "not knowing much about music" (Burroughs in Miles 1997:241) and yet perhaps his most apparent and widespread cultural manifestation regarding sound is through references within the history of Western popular music. What is striking about the instances where references to Burroughs' work, or Burroughs himself, appear in popular music history is the diverse range of genres in which he is found. I will not attempt an exhaustive list of Burroughs' resonance within Western

popular music, as the references are numerous and continue to grow, but cover some of the more familiar examples.

Graham Caveney claims Burroughs as the writer with the most eclectic influence on pop music, “leaving his mark on a whole range of movements from Punk to Techno, Hip-Hop to Grunge” (Caveney 1997:189), similarly Douglas Kahn suggests, in a sound arts context, that Burroughs’ “work and ideas are firmly ensconced among several generations, and his presence [...] shows no signs of fading” (Kahn 1999:293). Burroughs’ works inspired, for example, the naming of the English psychedelic band the Soft Machine and the post-punk 23 Skidoo, the American rock band Steely Dan, ‘Interzone’ a track by Joy Division, the New Romantic Duran Duran’s single ‘Wild Boys’, the hip hop artist DJ Spooky’s alias the Subliminal Kid. He appears at the centre of the cover of the Beatles’ *Sgt Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) and then thirty years later in U2’s music video *Last Night on Earth* (1997). He has performed on songs by Tom Waits, Laurie Anderson, REM, Kurt Cobain, The Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy and Gus van Sant¹ and recordings of his voice frequently appear and reappear, in mixes and remixes. The track ‘Is Everybody In?’ on the Doors tribute album *Stoned Immaculate: The Music of The Doors* contains recordings of Burroughs reading Jim Morrison’s poems over looped extracts from previous recordings by the band (including samples of vocal sounds by Morrison) along with new material recorded by the surviving band members.

He is occasionally credited as a possible source in the etymology of the term Heavy Metal music via the text “Heavy Metal People of Uranus wrapped in cool blue mist of vaporized bank notes—And The Insect People of Minraud with metal music” (Burroughs 1964:112).² He is of integral importance for the birth of Industrial music being, as Simon Ford (Ford 2001:11.6) suggests, “a constant reference point” for Industrial Records founder Genesis P-Orridge.

Brent Wood cites Burroughs’ position “with respect to mainstream corporate culture [as being] analogous” to Public Enemy in terms of his techniques of cultural appropriation (Wood 1995:1), and he continues to be referenced posthumously into the twenty-first century with such artists as Canadian jazz musician Glen Hall’s *Hallucinations: Music & Words For William S. Burroughs* (2006), or in the title of the single ‘Atlantis to Interzone’ (2006) by the London-based band the Klaxons. Some of Iggy Pop’s lyrics in

¹‘That’s the Way’, *The Black Rider* LP (1993), ‘Sharkey’s Night’ *Mister Heartbreak* LP (1984), ‘Star Me Kitten’, *Songs in the Key of X* LP (1996), *The “Priest” They Called Him* EP (1993), *Spare Ass Annie and other Tales* LP (1993) and *The Elvis of Letters* LP (1995) respectively.

² Caveney overenthusiastically credits him via *Naked Lunch*, a novel in which the term does not appear (Caveney 1997:193)

the David Bowie collaboration 'Lust for Life' (1977) are drawn directly from Burroughs, most overtly in the character of Johnny Yen from *The Ticket that Exploded* (Burroughs 1962), a song that has its own legacy in film and television commercials as well as prominent cover versions. Outside of the musical mainstream Burroughs' legacy appears just as resonant from the '60s, for example Gordon Mumma's *Megaton for William Burroughs* (1962-65) a "rare example of a tribute to and a mature reception of Burroughs at the time" (Dietrich in Adlington 2009:176), to contemporary practices that exploit the arbitrary techniques and/or the radical content for which Burroughs became known. David Toop's interview with the hugely influential, multi-genre musician Bill Laswell is particularly indicative of the kind of synergy musicians and sound makers might have with Burroughs' project:

The work Burroughs did with [Brion] Gysin [...] was all about deconstructing language and form. The only way to arrive at some new way was by deconstructing or changing – by the cut-up method or by erasing the words [...] – all that is incredibly valuable for the musician [...] a person that's trying to be creative.

Laswell in Toop 1999:177

I list these extensive references to demonstrate Burroughs' remarkable resonance in both decades of music and in an extraordinary range of popular genres. It appears that the figure of Burroughs drifts both underneath popular music production and through less generic audial practices. Yet despite this resonance, academic discussion of Burroughs in sound-related discourse appears comparatively rare.

My hypothesis is that Burroughs' resonance within popular music, in addition to more avant-garde and experimental audial practices, is evidence of something more than the adoption of his image as solely symbolic of allegiance to counter-cultural values. Burroughs' project labours to resist, and indeed counters, dominant ideology and preconceived suppositions of meaning. As such it adheres to Laswell's observation of a project that promotes "changing" and is therefore of implicit value for creativity and creative practitioners.

It is clear from the breadth of sources identified above that Burroughs' appeal is not limited to a specific social or political domain or to a specific form of audial practice. A visible presence in psychedelic rock, punk, post-punk, industrial music, hip-hop and experimental sound and audiovisual practices indicate nomadic possibilities and a lack of

governing ideology. This freedom suggests Burroughs as a suitable resource for a curatorial strategy that emphasises the practice-based approach outlined in Chapter One.

One interpretation of Burroughs' attraction for musical practices could be part of Burroughs' avowed countercultural agenda, in essence an agenda for cultural autonomy not conforming to a central ideology but resisting ideology. Such an agenda may make Burroughs' practice welcome for those with reactionary or contrarian attitudes amongst disfranchised or pseudo-political youths with access to his materials. Such youths indeed as those regularly granted heroic status in his novels such as *The Wild Boys* (Burroughs 1971) and *Port of Saints* (Burroughs 1973).

Burroughs' countercultural reputation has been built on a number of culturally dependent factors beyond the experimentalism of his work: his adherence to Scientology and other fringe belief systems, his homosexuality, the death of Joan Vollmer, his drug abuse, suggestions of a sympathetic attitude to paedophilia,³ his advocacy of the Right to Bear Arms and his explicit criticism of major religions being some of the most evident.

Occasionally some of these factors are conveniently airbrushed in order to ensure Burroughs represents the right kind of counterculture. There appears to be a reluctance to acknowledge that Burroughs frequently held beliefs more in common with a traditional conservative, pro-gun politics based more on individual freedoms than community and social responsibility (see Johnson 2006:100-107, in which a chapter is devoted to the complexities of Burroughs' "laissez-faire capitalist", "anti-communist" political position). A speaker at a talk on Burroughs that I attended⁴ suggested that Burroughs' defence of the Right to Bear Arms was limited to small arms and would not have included excessive weaponry such as assault rifles. One could contest this with footage in Lars Movin and Steen Møller Rasmussen's film *Words of Advice – William S. Burroughs on the Road* that shows Burroughs' homemade cannon built to launch bowling balls, clearly an excessive firearm (Movin 2007). It might, however, be such extreme or ambivalent attitudes that have allowed Burroughs to retain his countercultural crown.

Whilst some of these factors have become less socially antagonistic as attitudes have changed, others have remained problematic or become more so. Burroughs' social and political slipperiness, including indications of misogyny,⁵ may be as much a part of

³ Part of the case brought for the banning of *Naked Lunch*

⁴ At the October Gallery in London to coincide with the private view on the 5th December of *WILLIAM BURROUGHS: All out of time and into space*, nine days before the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting that brought the issue of assault weapons back onto the immediate media agenda.

⁵ "I think [women] were a basic mistake, and the whole dualistic universe evolved from this error." (Burroughs in Odier 1970:113)

his resonance to musical culture as his works themselves. His resistance to sociocultural simplicity may be partly to blame for his continued resonance in countercultural circles.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the time period I shall emphasise in my analysis of Burroughs is the point at which his practice developed from a predominantly literary endeavour to a multimedia project. His writing was already bound up with performance and experiments with divergent forms of writing, such as the letter in *The Yage Letters*, (Burroughs 2006), first published in 1963 but with most of the material dating from the early 1950s, and the idea of words as a pliable resource whose order was not set such as in *Naked Lunch* (Burroughs 1959) and *Word Hoard*, an unpublished text written between 1953 and 1958 that ended up forming parts of later texts including *Naked Lunch*. Despite this it would take the artist Brion Gysin to introduce Burroughs to the tangible potentials of collage and audio experimentation and then Antony Balch to later bring this into film.

Although upon his return to the United States in the mid '70s Burroughs was to limit this expanded practice to more traditional conceptions of visual art, music and literature,⁶ from the late '50s to the mid '70s, Burroughs' output demonstrates a complex mixture of media and activities. Mixing aspects of Scientology and Dianetics, esotericism and a revisionist model of art history, Burroughs investigated a way of engaging with cultural practice that to this day resonates in audial and audiovisual arts practices.

3.1 Burroughs' Voice and the *Routine*

Secondary to Burroughs' resonance within music, the most detectable sonic presence of Burroughs in contemporary culture is that of his voice. Burroughs' voice has two central qualities: that of its unmistakable character and how this both resonates through and informs his writing.

Burroughs' early style of writing preceding the cut-up period originates from a sonorous act. This style Burroughs referred to, in vaudeville tradition, as the *routine*. Routines in Burroughs' writing are "wild freewheeling concatenations of bizarre imagery that develop out of his letters to Allen Ginsberg [to] become the primary material of *Naked Lunch*." (De Waal 2009:139-140). They are short vignettes that begin with the aim of captivating their audience before spinning wildly out of control in unhindered, improvisation of black humour and sexual or scatological hallucinations. Hemmer describes the routine as a vehicle in which to "create grotesque scenes in an attempt to

⁶ Aided by the efforts of Grauerholz in helping Burroughs to apply his work within a more economically viable context.

affront his readers' moral apathy" (Hemmer 2009:70). In spite of this however routines, although clearly intentionally provocative, are more representative of a principle of freedom of expression rather than political subversion. The routine is a product of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. That said, its purpose is more Machiavellian. Lydenberg describes how, for Burroughs:

The routine alone can lift him out of the hopeless monotony of his drug addiction, physical discomfort, or loneliness, out of the Beckett-like bleakness of his vision of human life.

Lydenberg 1987:75

She identifies how, for Burroughs, the routine provides a "moment's freedom from the cautious, nagging, aging, frightened flesh" (Burroughs in Harris 1993:245). As such the routine is a vehicle for liberation from stasis and cycles of action.

Routines are desperate and unstructured, formed from whatever resources come to hand:

Routines are completely spontaneous and proceed from whatever fragmentary knowledge you have. In fact a routine is by nature fragmentary, inaccurate.

Burroughs in Harris 1993:244

As Lydenberg observes, the routine acts to force Burroughs out of a perceived prison of control. Harris agrees, but emphasises the vocal as an important factor in these frantic acts of emancipation: "as a theatrical form, the routine is committed to achieving an excessive vocal presence in proportion to the frustrating invisibility of power" (Harris 2003:126). Burroughs' routines are most visible as writing, however key to the routine form is the fact that they did not originate in the written word. Many of the routines developed as informal vocal acts. Discussing Burroughs routine form of writing Harris connects it to the vocal tradition of performance: "the written record of a past relationship with a listener conducted through spoken routines" (Harris 2003:134). The freewheeling nature of the routines themselves is more characteristic of the improvisation qualities of the voice than the prepared edit of the written word.

Burroughs' *Queer* narrates a scene describing the autonomous nature of a routine, "Lee" being Burroughs' pseudonym in the narrative:

The routine was coming to him like dictation. He did not know what he was going to say next, but he suspected the monologue was about to get dirty. He looked at Mary. She was exchanging significant glances with Allerton. 'Some sort of lover code,' Lee decided. 'She is telling him they have to go now.' Allerton

got up, saying he had to have a haircut before going to work. Mary and Allerton left. Lee was alone in the bar. The monologue continued.

Burroughs 1985:70

Burroughs' frustration with external factors, such as the sexual ambivalence of Allerton (the fictional pseudonym of Adelbert Lewis Marker), the subject of Burroughs' unrequited affections, are the targets of Burroughs' voice. Although the routines are motivated by conscious goals, they are characterised by spontaneous production and take on their own life, perpetuating the project even when the desired result is no longer accessible. This is significant for a discussion of Burroughs on sound partly because it creates a link between Burroughs' physical and psychological needs and his use of voice, but also as it emphasises voice as a solution to obstructions and does so in a manner that generates material beyond the project's rationale. As I undertake my analysis of Burroughs' tape experiments it will be clear that Burroughs' voice, and indeed the sounding world around it, is directly linked, for Burroughs, to liberation from control.

Harris also traces however, how, quite early on in Burroughs' writing, the routines become detached from their vocal origins and become instead devised through letter writing. Nonetheless, as Harris acknowledges via Simon Bischoff and Linda Kauffman (Ibid. 141), the relationship between the letter and the speaking voice is crucial: "In the letter the line of flight which leads away from writing and back to the voice is intensified (signs become bodies!)" (Bischoff in Harris 2003:141) "Burroughs found the letter served him well as a recorder of voices" (Harris 2003:141).

Burroughs' development as a writer is, therefore, profoundly linked with his voice and physical body. The voice of Burroughs that appears in his writing is not just a dictation but is intrinsically born out of his voice, and a voice that is produced as an instrument for achieving his desires. Returning to my discussion of Clarke in Chapter One, the routine form can therefore be read as being brought into operation in response to affordances, a resolution of need. As such the link between voice and Burroughs' literary production is most acute when being brought into play at specific times of need.

This need reconnects the voice to Burroughs' body; it is through Burroughs' voice that he seeks to solve the problems of his "nagging, aging, frightened flesh". It is a visceral voice, a vocal flesh that *nags*. In one of his most famous routines, Doctor Benway's "man who taught his asshole to talk" from *Naked Lunch* (Burroughs 2005:110-112), a vocal asshole demands the equal rights as the rest of the body and wants "to be kissed same as any other mouth" (Ibid. 111).

Returning to Harris' suggestion of Burroughs' letter writing as a recording of voices, this connection is significant as letter writing is a process that, as Harris convincingly demonstrates (in Harris 2003), had such a major effect on Burroughs' early development as a writer. Burroughs' tape experiments are often viewed as an offshoot of his literary endeavours, and not without good reason. However considering the letter as a "recorder of voices", and the epistolary form as crucial to Burroughs' production (as Harris does), shifts the tape recorder to the centre of Burroughs' project. Not only this, but through the vocal design of the routine form it is the audible act that emerges from the body ultimately as a tool for the emancipation from control.

3.1.1 Burroughs' Voice

Then there was the voice: the flat mid-west accent of TS Eliot or Ezra Pound, dry as paper, the clipped syllables of a 1920s newscaster reporting the Great Crash, sometimes affecting a campy edge. [...] Many people have said that they didn't really understand Burroughs until they heard *that voice* – the voice of a banker saying all those outrageous things.

Miles 2002:4 (original emphasis)

In *William Burroughs and the Secret of Fascination*, Harris chooses to describe Burroughs' "first appearance" as the "malicious-looking smile" (Harris 2003:1) of Jack Kerouac's *Town and the City*, a smile, a producer of voice, that is "a sign of fascination, because it acts out the image's power of mimetic magic and inaugurates Burroughs' distinct iconicity, infectious now across five decades" (Ibid. 2). This infection however, reached iconic status in popular musical circles when, as previously mentioned, Burroughs appeared in the centre of Peter Blake's design for the album cover of The Beatles' *Sgt Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Yet how did it get there from what could be considered comparative obscurity?

In his biography of The Beatles' Paul McCartney, Barry Miles describes Burroughs' "cold, flat Mid-Western" drawl from the 1965 spoken word album *Call Me Burroughs* as being "a great favourite for late-evening listening when people were stoned [that McCartney heard] reading from *The Naked Lunch* before he saw the book" (Miles 1997:233). On the basis of *Call Me Burroughs*, released in the UK just prior to Burroughs settling in the United Kingdom for the long-term, McCartney hired Sommerville, who

had produced the album, to operate a tape studio in London. From this studio Burroughs would have been able to expand his access to the possibilities of tape recordings under Sommerville's technical guidance and as part of a wider discourse surrounding experimental uses for tape in music. So it is not only the notion of the recording of voices that lies at the core of Burroughs' production. Burroughs' voice introduced to McCartney through *Call Me Burroughs*, produces one of Burroughs' key moments of Western pop cultural resonance: his face at the centre of the cover of *Sgt Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

Taking my suggestion that the concept of a recorder of voices is so central to Burroughs' project, it is surprising that more has not been made of the tape experiments in sustained critical discussion. One text that does broach the issue of Burroughs' experiments with tape directly however also begins with Burroughs' voice, which appears in *Wireless Imagination* (Kahn 1992) in an essay by Burroughs scholar Robin Lydenberg entitled 'Sound Identity Fading out: William Burroughs' Tape Experiments'.

In the context of *Wireless Imagination*, Burroughs appears amongst a broad alchemy of sources that, according to its preface, attempt to propose their subjects as "first utterances still looking for an autonomous language" (Kahn 1992:xi). This suggestion places Burroughs within the project of an attempt to somehow give structure, or "language" to sound from the perspective of radio art. As, quite literally, a distinctive voice in experiments with sound, Lydenberg's analysis of Burroughs' utterances appears at the end of *Wireless Imagination* like a coda.

Lydenberg begins her essay on Burroughs' tape experiments by quoting from Joan Didion's review of *The Soft Machine*, summarising her assertion that, for Didion, Burroughs' literary work is less about content but medium: "the point is not what the voice is saying but the voice itself" (Didion in Lydenberg 1992:409). She declares that Didion's appreciation of Burroughs is as "impersonator", one who "captures and transforms" our acoustic environment (Ibid.).

As a writer obsessed with the concrete possibilities and hindrances of words, Burroughs expansion of his project into the voice is an understandable one. Burroughs' voice itself, the "cold, flat Mid-Western drawl" as Miles describes it, is an emotive one and not "flat" in the sense of being featureless. A gravelly savouring of words is as suggestive of the biological process of reaching the "malicious-looking smile" as it is of a fixation with the very nature of the utterances that it emits. In this way, for me, Burroughs' voice could be said to mimic the cut-up in its focus both on the material and

the semantic; the process of its formation alongside the grinding around of its components. Burroughs' voice seems to bring the entire cognitive body with it in its production of sound.

Similarly Lydenberg describes the tape experiments as being representative of Burroughs' "most [explicit] exploration of voice, of the word's relationship to the body, of the proliferation of the word by the mass media, and of the word as weapon of illusion and control" (Lydenberg 1992:409). She acknowledges Burroughs' concern for language's threat to freedom and spontaneity. His experiments are suggested as a "cure" from the "viral infection" of "word and image" (Ibid. 413), an implication that they attempt to counteract the confinements of language's rigidity.

Lydenberg makes two other, connected, claims for Burroughs' tape experiments. The first is through her underlining of the physicality of Burroughs' engagement with words, both through his text cut-ups and the tape manipulation techniques of his sound experiments (Lydenberg 1992:414); an important recognition in that it situates the significance of the cut-ups in the process as much as in the product. The second being her identification of the essential connection, for Burroughs, between the technology of his creative production and the world of magic. She acknowledges Burroughs' scepticism for the external interactions of spirits in place of results emanating from the subconscious of the experimenter. In this latter case, the tape machine, for Burroughs and according to Lydenberg, functions as a vehicle for self-exploration as much as for the exploration of sound. Like the routine form, the tape machine appears to be directed at the fulfilment of a defined goal. The consequence of this is that Lydenberg recognises the process of undertaking the experiments (rather than the final experiments themselves) as a crucial component in a tape experiment's status.

In Burroughs' *The Ticket That Exploded* (Burroughs 1967) Burroughs ends the book with a hand-written, or hand-drawn, page by Brion Gysin in which Burroughs' phrase "silence to say goodbye" dematerialises into Gysin's calligraphic gestures. Like the "fading out" of Burroughs' appearance as the very last topic of *Wireless Imagination*, the end of *The Ticket That Exploded* is performed as if beyond Burroughs' assault on the word there is only silence and departure. However looking more closely, as I have articulated in my discussion of the cut-up technique in Chapter Two, the point at which the word becomes activated in Burroughs' project in its ideal form is as material in perpetual cut-up, a performance with meaning-making undergoing perpetual revolution.

I shall outline the case for this being explicit in the closing pages of *The Ticket That Exploded*, to show how this silence could be read as a space for action.

In her book *Word Cultures*, Lydenberg discusses the final chapter of *The Ticket That Exploded* as follows:

[The final] chapter ends [...] with a long series of farewells from various [...] characters, including the narrator who bids a courageous goodbye to his lost innocence and youth, his dreams, his very self [...]. In the final paragraph [the narrative] swings back from the silent void of abandoned memory and identity to the expansive high energy of the excited storyteller [with] final questions [that] return us to the novel's first chapter [...] and bring the narrative full circle once again.

Beyond the closed circle of this chapter, however, Burroughs extends two gestures. The first is a page of Brion Gysin's calligraphic permutations of the phrase "silence to say goodbye," and the second is Burroughs' essay "the invisible generation" which was appended to the later editions of *Ticket*. This essay functions as a didactic coda of practical advice on applications of the cut-up techniques.

Lydenberg 1987:93-94

Lydenberg briefly concludes how this series of endings are:

gestures of displacement and depersonalization, of a self-reflexivity that eventually cancels its "self" out [...] the body, time, identity and word [...] vibrated into the freedom of indeterminacy.

Lydenberg 1987:94

Lydenberg observes above how *The Ticket That Exploded* appears to be a series of endings, of Burroughs' characters, of Burroughs the writer, of the book itself and the combined physical and metaphysical elements of the cut-up narrative. However it is the didactic nature of the coda that hints at something beyond not only this "long series of farewells" but also of the book itself. Whilst, as Lydenberg observes, the "full circle" of the narrative returns the book to its beginning, through the didacticism of the final section that appends this cycle, the book launches a new activity that breaks out of this loop and into new projects.

It is, for me, the inclusion of Gysin's calligraphic works and 'the invisible generation' section that are crucial advocacies not of silence but of action. The narrative of *The Ticket That Exploded* is complete, it fades away into absence and folds back into the

beginning as Lydenberg describes but then it is replaced by a collaborative, painterly intervention of Gysin's calligraphic gesture and a clear description of activities for the reader.

In the final section of *The Ticket That Exploded*, the cut-ups' ultimate representation as linear narrative can be seen not as the failure of the project but as the beginning of the reader's activation. It is as if the real work begins now that the book has ended. First with a decentralised notion of authorship: the Gysin image announcing that Burroughs is not an exclusive source of such experimentation; and secondly with a call to arms for others to undertake experiments for themselves.

This call to arms is, in my research, also a call for me to develop a practical example of the curatorial strategy. The approach to curatorial practice undertaken in Chapter Four therefore will embrace some key features of Burroughs' experiments, his space and meaning-making, mediated by acknowledged shifts in context.

3.2 The Tape Experiments

I have already discussed how the audience of the work in the curatorial context described in Chapter One has an active status in the meaning-making process. I have also discussed how this might be compared to the mode of perpetual creative engagement suggested by my analysis of the cut-up technique: how, for Burroughs, the activity of the writer of cut-ups ideally extends to the reader in a manner that makes the cut-up project about active participation. As the tape experiments contain cut-up techniques common to the texts, albeit in the different structure and delivery of magnetic tape, I shall extend this argument from reader to listener. Burroughs' relationship to sound is not through a knowledge of music, but through a vocal and physical participation in the audial, so to further uncover Burroughs' attitudes to sound I will consider a select number of experiments.

I have identified four of Burroughs' tape experiments to review in detail as examples of Burroughs' activity. I have identified the experiments as incorporating audial material and techniques that recur across Burroughs' experiments. The materials include news stories, readings of Burroughs' written and selected texts (in the cases discussed read either by Burroughs or Ian Sommerville), radio interference and other radio and television broadcasts, and ambient recordings. The tape manipulation and recording techniques include dropping material into recordings by recording over

random intervals in pre-recorded tape, “inching” by which tape is moved back and forth across the tape heads, and the use of multiple overlays of sound. By ensuring that all of these materials and techniques are represented by the experiments that I have selected I will be drawing out themes that resonate throughout Burroughs’ project yet are able to reveal important insights in their own particular context.

The selected experiments are ‘Handkerchief Masks, News Cut-up’ (circa 1960) released in 1981 on *Nothing Here Now But the Recordings*, ‘Working with the Popular Forces’ (circa 1965) released on *Break Through in Grey Room* (1994), and two unreleased recordings: ‘Her Primrose Laundry’ (circa 1966) and ‘WSB. and IS. Stereo Experiment’ (circa 1965). As this thesis is an attempt to articulate a curatorial methodology, I will include in this review how these experiments appear in terms of the complexity of their relationship to an audience. The assumption of an audience (which I have been referring to as the visitor) can be assumed to be an implicit part of the curatorial process, yet the status of Burroughs’ tape experiments (as I shall determine later) is one that problematises their relationship to an audience in a way that his written work does not.

I will be reviewing the above materials using a qualitative methodology that includes my own descriptive analysis of my listening experience alongside investigating each experiment’s sources and techniques. I will be listening for concepts of meaning to Burroughs’ activities as an extension of my articulation of a Burroughsian attitude to meaning and the meaning-making process, in addition to developing an account of a Burroughsian attitude to sound.

As I have described in my analysis of Burroughs’ voice and the routine, two audial forms guided Burroughs’ development as a writer: the routine, with its vocal origins, and the letter as a “recorder of voices”. These two forms that are crucial to Burroughs’ production indicate a strong argument for the tape recorder, as a recorder of voices, as a significant vehicle for Burroughs’ project.

Unlike Burroughs’ written material however, the tape experiments were not intended for public release, so granting them a status as material to be engaged with is problematic. As an oeuvre the methodology of their production is confused and multifarious. Like the routines, they are activities brought into play at specific times of need, but unlike the routines they were not folded back into a public project and therefore exist without a definitive framework for analysis.

For this reason I will approach individual experiments from very different analytical perspectives. In the first case I will incorporate my own listening environment,

then as I delve deeper into the content of the experiments I will leave than listening environment behind. I adopt a variety of listening and documenting approaches that shift according to a perceived ecological need, that is in an attempt to maintain an appropriate analysis to their shifting content. Principally I will adopt an embodied listening and recording, following what Peggy Phelan refers to as "performative writing" (Phelan 1997) or the approach taken by Adrian Heathfield in his monograph on the artist Tehching Hsieh (Heathfield 2009). Phelan maintains that "performative writing enacts the death of the "we" that we think we are before we begin to write [as] a statement of allegiance to the radicality of unknowing who we are becoming" (Phelan 1997:17) Describing and mimicking the process of live investigation these reviews are intended to, like Phelan, resist the "ideology of knowledge as a progressive movement forever approaching a completed end-point" (Ibid.). This methodology acknowledges the creative journalism of Burroughs' *The Job* as well as Heathfield's opening acknowledgement of his monograph as "a story [with] a protagonist [a] journey and a series of encounters" (Heathfield 2009:11) and, like Phelan, accepts the theatricality of this process to, as she puts it so succinctly, "illustrate the drama of the present tense" (Phelan 1997:18). I consider this methodology appropriate for the context set out in this thesis in terms of additional rationales: firstly, in its Burroughsian resistance to hegemonies of knowledge as maintained by the dominant cultural order; secondly, to highlight embodiment in the review as an appropriate response to Burroughs following his assertion of the tape machine as an extension of the nervous system; and thirdly, through Burroughs' adoption of Korzybski to the effect of avoidance of sustained causality, thus maintaining a theatre of present-time.⁷

This approach responds to the emphasis I have placed on the concepts of the niche and domain, in effect presenting an explicitly subjective review as rigorous research. Through the review I also attempt to prioritise affordance over values in terms of the unpacking of the material, seeking both what Burroughs and/or Sommerville might apply to such an emphasis (whilst acknowledging the ultimate uncertainty in the observer's niche/observed's niche interaction), and seeking my own affordances on the basis of this research in its entirety. Such an approach also responds to an acknowledgement of the embodiment of these reviews, accepting the performative framework of need and cognitive subjectivity. When I originally recorded my analysis of

⁷ By this I am referring to Burroughs' use of Korzybski to postulate space-binding relations to the world that avoid recognition of causality to prioritise instead cognitive interactions governed by a magical universe.

the experiments I found myself experiencing Clarke's observation as articulated in Chapter One that the more one approaches their understanding of a sound's meaning in relation to its source, the more it becomes "difficult to detect the sound's distinctive features" (Clarke 2005:34), and so the following account of the experiments is intended to reflect this process.

3.2.1 The Tapes

A detailed chronological survey of Burroughs' tape experiments is impossible. Many of the tapes, particularly from the London period during which Sommerville's technical expertise would have been most apparent, have been lost. Published collections of these recordings have the effect of, rather neatly, compartmentalising the recordings into definite tracks. The same effect can also be said to take place in the placing of unpublished recordings onto the British Library Sound Server, through which individual sections are interpreted as separate tracks to create definitive start and end points of recordings. Although convenient for the listener this categorising artificially cleans up the original tapes, tapes one has to go back to in order to appreciate the notorious disorderliness of Burroughs' archival activities. As a factor of the material, this disorderliness is a characteristic that it is perhaps disingenuous to lose; they have the character of material for investigation, a character that sits comfortably with Burroughs' project as I have thus far articulated it.

The most common access to the material is not in their original form. *Nothing Here Now But The Recordings*, the early collection of Burroughs' tape experiments, was published on vinyl LP, and subsequently on CD. This change in access is worth mentioning here as it changes the relationship with the tangible nature of the material. As described earlier, one of the most critical implications of Burroughs' cut-up project was the establishment of a technique of on-going practice both in terms of a text in continuous readjustment and also in terms of its shifting of site of creative activity from author to reader. Replacing the material of the tape with the material of a vinyl LP or Compact Disc make this process less explicit; it is easier to cut through a page than a record⁸ or CD, particularly if you want it to play again. An opposite case can be made

⁸ Incidentally Alex Baker, a London-based artist made a series of works in the early 21st Century in which he bisected records of music including Beethoven, Elvis Presley, Tom Jones, Perry Como and Electro 6 before gluing them back together. For this reason alongside similar works, Baker and collaborator Kit Poulson, were asked to contribute to the exhibition discussed in Chapter Four.

for digital audio formats. Much of the contemporary access to the experiments via platforms such as the British Library Sound Server and online archives like UbuWeb comes in digital form, a form in which it is not only relatively straightforward to cut and paste material, but can be done so in far smaller units and with far greater manipulative effect than that possible on tape. However the physical act of interfering with the material is very much absent. The crucial effect of this is to lose a direct connection between the activity in which Burroughs engaged and the activity in which the contemporary listener it likely to be engaging. The process from past to contemporary listening has become heavily mediated, and this may be said to have an acute effect on the concept of on-going practice. I shall come back to this later when discussing specific recordings.

Burroughs' experiments held by the British Library contain a mixture of interviews; sections blanked over; fragments and extracts of recordings and experiments, and more refined compositions. The tapes have been barely catalogued to the degree where many recordings are untitled and many have an uncertain archival status, with some containing samples running at different speeds whilst not immediately giving the listener any idea what the intended speed for playback might be. Additional to this is the quality of many of the tapes, some of which have evidently been used for recording a number of times, and others containing artefacts that, it can be argued, were left over from previous unrelated recordings. Many tapes exist in second or subsequent generation.

As I prepare to listen to the experiments in the British Library, outside of the artistic context of the studio, they take the form of documentation. The first thing I notice without listening too closely is that the tapes (through their technology) present a sense of historical authenticity. The accents and fidelity of the recorded voices (and they are predominantly voices) are inextricable from the notion of a past: mid-20th Century voices recorded on obsolete equipment. My first relationship to the experiments is one of nostalgia both real and assimilated as a Western cultural trope. Of course this is a common reaction to archive material and I shall return to it in my closing analysis of these experiments, but in light of my analysis of Burroughsian Time-Binding it seems important to bear this in mind.

The first influencing factor when listening to recordings of Burroughs' tape recorder experiments is the contextual bias of his cultural status, what Harris terms his "fascination" (Harris 2003). It is unlikely that a contemporary listener would have come

to these recordings prior to crossing Burroughs' path in another medium due to his presence across multiple media and the comparative obscurity of the tape experiments. In essence these recordings are likely to be preceded by expectation, and, most significantly, an expectation that has undergone heavy distortion via counter-cultural and pop-cultural lenses, his association with the writers Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, the media-defined "Beatniks" (Campbell 1999), or his later association with Punk, Grunge and Industrial music, for example ((Caveney 1999), (McNeill 1997) and (Ford 2001)).

I have, in this thesis, discussed the idea of an active visitor, one who brings their own cognitive niche and relationship to meaning-making with them when they step into a cultural space. Therefore I feel, in my forthcoming discussion of specific experiments, that I am obligated to include some of my own subjective details with regards to my listening experience. This approach is an analysis in the sense that it is a review of an experience, and will not leave out factors that may be considered pedantic or prosaic, yet integral to the context of this experience. I use this strategy to reveal the relation between these surviving materials of Burroughs' activity and my experience of them.

In my analysis of the experiments I shall occasionally refer to the listener. In this context the listener is an appropriate device to represent the visitor as the listener would be come in an exhibition context. It should be clear that the terms are therefore connected.

3.2.2 'Handkerchief Masks, News Cut-ups'

The first recording I have chosen is one of the more available ones, and one that appeared on the first published release of Burroughs' experiments (although, incidentally, not the first release of Burroughs' voice). I am listening to 'Handkerchief Masks, News Cut-ups' (circa 1960) collected on to the album *Nothing Here Now But the Recordings*. It comes in at just under three-and-a-half minutes in length. The version of this album I have closest to hand is in fact the one on a four compact disc set titled *The Best of William S. Burroughs: From Giorno Poetry Systems* (1998), perhaps notable in that its box has retained the size of an LP, a choice that is perhaps an attempt to evoke an era predating the CDs inside, to lend the set an authenticity or to force retailers and libraries to place the publication in the LP or outsized items section of their store. David Toop described this approach via an email exchange as:

...typical of the repackaging of the avant-garde archive, or all other archives; the more abject or scattered the source materials, the more pathos and excess is made apparent by the mausoleum quality of the commodity object.

Toop via email 8th July 2012

As such this material appears to be a highly indicative example of this mausoleum object. A black box displays a coloured photograph of Burroughs on its cover, which lends the enclosed material a suggestion of historicity. The comparative scale of the packaging to its contents makes the package as a whole, and the fabric texture of the box exterior, seem suspiciously overproduced. These details are important as they pre-empt the contemporary experience of these experiments with a tactile sensibility that makes me, the audience, very apparent as a component, or consumer, of the experience. Whilst the readings on the collection clearly indicate an audience, the included experiments, as I will demonstrate, have a far more problematic relationship to a potential audience, and the ostentatious description on the cover of the packaging: “The Best of William Burroughs” influence the experiments inside with audience expectation.

*Nothing Here Now But the Recordings*⁹ is the final recording released on the Industrial Records label. Industrial Records were a record label established in 1976 by the performance art ensemble COUM Transmissions as part of their metamorphosis into industrial music pioneers Throbbing Gristle. This final release was as homage to Burroughs’ influence on Genesis P-Orridge, the group’s lead singer (Ford 2001:11.6).

That the label was formed at a pivotal transition from art gallery to music proposition seems to be of some importance. *Nothing Here Now But the Recordings* is published by an artistic collective at a major shift between contexts of artistic production. COUM member Peter Christopherson is quoted in Simon Ford’s *Wreckers of Civilisation* as remarking that the move from the gallery into music was due to a feeling that: “the art establishment was a waste of time” (Christopherson in Ford 1999:6.27).

My awareness of the circumstances of publication seems to have an effect on the meaning-making process as it plays itself out. I am also aware that despite COUM/Throbbing Gristle’s abandonment of the art establishment, in 2007, just over thirty years after the end of COUM, a reunited Throbbing Gristle gave a one-off performance at Tate Modern. The packaged material, and its contents, seems, by association, to have been united with the establishment.

⁹ The cover of which is a far more subdued black and white photograph of a lone tape recorder in an empty room.

The version I have in front of me, *The Best of William S. Burroughs*, was released the year after Burroughs' death and contains a picture of Burroughs lying in state, alongside a list of objects placed in his casket. Like Damien Hirst's portrait of Burroughs in the exhibition 'Burroughs Live',¹⁰ which consisted of a cabinet of objects about Burroughs including bullets shot by him, the packaging is seeped in homage and historicity. There is the overwhelming sense of a foreshadowing of the material in the kind of resonance or "fascination" that may make Burroughs such an oft-quoted icon for popular music. The inclusion of a facsimile of the sleeve notes in the accompanying printed material, lends the recording a glaze of reproduction and re-contextualisation that feels both at odds with an attempt to engage directly with Burroughs' experiments, and perhaps symptomatic of his contemporary presence. The details of his project may have been so overdressed by fixing his presence in a lineage of cause and effect that, to engage more appropriately with them, it is something I need to consciously avoid. I need to temporarily discard the rigour of academic theorising in order to experiment. Thus I buy a tape recorder and head to London College of Communication to undertake some recordings in the style of Burroughs' activities. I chose to make "Playback" experiments: recording an hour of material and playing it back just below an audible level to create some kind of magical effect (for an descriptions of such experiments see McLean in Davisson 2003). Returning home I thread an Akai 4000DS MK-II reel-to-reel tape deck and listen to the sound of the tape itself and, running the thin tape over the heads, an end comes loose and the cats play with it. They appear to have a different set of affordances for this tape. For them it is prey, or perhaps also a form of practice.

I return to 'Handkerchief Masks, News Cut-ups', iTunes imports the CD and, as I don't have my speakers set up here, and not prepared to listen to the track through the small stereo speakers on the base of my old iBook G4, I fetch and plug in some external speakers, having to reset the treble and bass. The presence of the Akai reel-to-reel and the process of importing the CD remind me of how much of the physicality of Burroughs' experiments has been lost in the digital process. Alongside the visual presence of the reel-to-reel, the movement of the tape and the actual material itself is conspicuously absent.

The physical engagement with materials, critical to Burroughs text and tape work in so far as it demonstrates a tangible engagement with words-as-text, is replaced with a simple mouse click on an icon. There is some degree of connection however: the

¹⁰ *Burroughs Live*, curated by José Férrez and David Thorp, formed part of the exhibition *Collision Course*, itself part of the GSK Contemporary Season, and ran from the 8th December 2008 until 9th January 2009.

process of importing the CD, of opening iTunes on a sluggish computer, the attaching of external speakers, all remind me of manual tasks necessary were I required to thread up the reel-to-reel, and yet the complex routine required in threading up a reel-to-reel tape, of the resistance of the switches and buttons, the occasional accidental overdubbing; the interference of the technology, is almost absent. This is important as it, once again, influences the forthcoming sounds via different expectation. This time criteria of the creative possibilities of near infinite synthesis suggested by the computer and the digital recording, removes me, as listener, one step away from the material.

Burroughs' repeated suggestion that his readers and listeners try the process for themselves offers a very different form of authorially validated accessibility to the material. There is, in my current listening environment, a disconnection between the treading of the machine and the potentials of cutting unto and rejoining tape. Although it would be relatively straightforward to open the imported sound file with audio editing software it is not a process as implicit as when the (sometimes fragile) material needs to be mounted onto a tape machine. Also the computer itself automatically opens iTunes in accordance with the conventions of the operating system and circumvents a more participatory software.

In my current listening environment, this accessibility now belongs to a different time and technology. It is still audible, yet it is removed from suggestions of direct engagement through the distancing of the recording from the original experiment and its means of production. The ramifications of this distancing is to force the listener to be a listener, and a reverent one at that, and not the active collaborator or experimenter approaching sound through active exploration and experimental engagement.

Recalling previous listening I am expecting the sounds of the practitioner to be ever-present in the forthcoming experience: clicks and blurred noises, the sounds of edits and audial artefacts leftover from the experimental processes, the background hiss of the room in which the tapes are recorded, incongruous phantoms of other times and spaces recorded over as the tape is reused. As the cuts and edits and swallowed sounds become routine I begin to question the act of listening as a process of conveying meaning. The audio environment of the recording is presented through the demonstration of its destabilisation. The presence of potential unintelligibility starts to become apparent due to the illusion of a pre-recorded environment being incomplete. Where is this environment? How many layers are we away from its content? Perhaps as the original title of the album within an album suggests, there is nothing here now but the recordings,

or more accurately perhaps: there is nothing here now but the recording of the recordings. This sense of distancing, contrasted with the immediacy of handling the reel-to-reel tape threaded into the machine, also highlights the potential changes in fidelity and interference (both additions and subtractions) caused by subsequent generations, and by editing and re-mastering of the original track. Prior even to playing the recording I am therefore very much aware that what it lacks is authorial authenticity and it feels several times removed from its environment of production.

Through the shift in media the recording has undergone a dramatic alteration in terms of interaction, being a presentation with its explicitly inherent materiality of tape manipulation replaced by a materiality of display. I recall the list of objects mentioned in the accompanying booklet, objects placed in Burroughs' casket. Burroughs' "most favourite gun, [...] his favourite cane, [...] heroin, [...] jockey underwear and socks"¹¹ the catalogues of his acolytes, a *display* of Burroughs. Like these objects the recordings have the sense of experiments removed from the listener as though behind glass in a museum.

The sound comes on with a tinny, lo-fi voice, distant with otherwise limited spatial presence. A North American news broadcast steeped, through the quality of the sound and the phrases uttered, in the contextual weight of its socio-political milieu. Several US radio and/or television stations broadcasting news programmes including what appears to be William Randolph Hurst's W.I.N.S. news programme, the sensationalist news programme of the period, and a brief extract from a Hispanic radio station.

Individual extracts are only a few seconds long and are frequently spliced into each other mid-sentence. They all occupy a one-dimensional soundscape of *information*. As the etymology suggests, "the News" is always *new*, in the present, with each subsequent edit replacing the last. In this case however the nostalgic, almost quaint, resonance of the voices and technology of recording undermine my attempts to listen to the experiment as a recurrent present, what might today be referred to as rolling news. The voices and their proclamations sound dead, and their 1960s audience absent.

Outside of the recording a police siren goes past my window, and I become suddenly aware of traffic splashing through the streets surrounding my office. This sudden spatial shift out of the recording prompts me to listen for any suggestions of a three-dimensional environment within the recording. Instead the spatial uniformity, the general evenness of broadcast news' audio production, of 'Handkerchief Masks, News

¹¹ From the booklet enclosed with *The Best of William Burroughs* (1998)

Cut-ups' force me into a listening that favours verbal content over breadth of audio-spatial complexity.

The recordings' main verbal features are reports on developments in the Viet Nam conflict, "Red China", references to President Lyndon B. Johnson, and other news stories including armed characters putting on the eponymous "handkerchief masks", a shooting, a perjury trial involving a parking meter. These news items are interrupted at short intervals by seemingly unrelated features including a brief extract from a chocolate ice cream advertisement, which I shall discuss later.

The various sources of news broadcast form the principle content of 'Handkerchief Masks, News Cut-up'. There are several different voices reading the news, and they cut not only between each other but also, in the case of the main source, into themselves. The reportage occasionally produces humorous effect through juxtaposition. For example at approximately 15 seconds: "Johnson, addressing a meeting of editorial cartoonists at the White House re- / held three maids at gunpoint and proceeded to ransack the apartment", however it is evident, through the majority of juxtapositions, that humour is only an occasional result of the technique, not its primary purpose.

As the principle content of the recording, the reportage assumes the main subject of the experiment. Accordingly the brief interference from an ice-cream commercial has a cataclysmic effect on the experiment's contextual stability. Its intrusion undermines the serious content of the broadcasts themselves, as 'factual' reportage, and despite its fleeting presence, locates the context of the material in the wider domain of broadcast media. It does this through the shaping the sources into a broadcast that is not just about specific content, but includes the suggestion of audience. I picture the smiling face of a blond-haired American child, and the manipulative associations of a seductive female voice mentioning "chocolate ice-cream" lends the preceding and continuing reportage a likewise manipulative aura.

Despite its brevity, the intrusion of a female voice, within an assembly of otherwise male voices, also produces other noticeable effects. It represents a distinct gender division between the serious business of war, of politics and of crime, in this recording a male pursuit, and a maternal presentation of food, and not just any food but the childhood indulgence of chocolate ice cream. It is in the inclusion of this section that the recording presents a duality of illusions in broadcast media, that of contentment and choice alongside information and fear, and presents the application of traditional

gender roles. Additionally, being within the frame of reference of broadcast media, it allies itself to the male assembly, confirming this tradition.

Almost 3 minutes into the recording is an abrupt burst of unidentifiable noise. It could be distorted Joujouka music.¹² Whatever the sound is, it comes in like a rude interruption of otherness, foreign and unsettling in an ear thus far accustomed to the American soundscape of the recording, and the stereotypical gender division of previous content. It gives the voices in the preceding montage a parochial flavour, despite the global concerns of the content of their speech. The flat timbre of the voice recordings is emphasised by the clamour, opening out the possibilities of the recording's content. The broadcasts, hitherto the soundscape of the recording, become a barrier whose clamour threatens to break through, a noise interrupting and disrupting the monologue of information.

In the split second of appearance, the clamour contributes to the perception that the many voices of the news broadcasts are emanating from one subjective state, which is to say one political position. Through redefining the voices as a local response to the global, the interruption also retroactively imbibes the voices with a naïveté towards the foreign, and powerlessness towards clamour: a chaos that cannot be contained by the simple dualisms of them and us, or male and female. The clamour is a disruption of stability, even in the unstable environment of arbitrarily edited tape.

The noise is followed by a pause in the news recordings lasting for approximately 7 seconds, with recordings of the ambient sounds of a room somewhere. My partner is moving a chair and the boiler switches itself on. The two spaces, my own, and that in the experiment are simultaneously present and not quite distinct. The sounds of the recording are difficult to objectify as material. I am not listening on headphones, so they fill the space and potentially veil nuances both within the recording and within my surrounding audial environment. I, of course, am allowing them to do this by using speakers as opposed to headphones, the latter of which would limit, though not completely obstruct, the interplay between the two spaces. I am aware that one space, the tape experiment, is incorporated within the other, the audial environment of my office. However there are moments, the subtle and minute sounds of my office and its surrounding environs, where the reverse happens. A click on the recording has vanished in repeat listening, it was there somewhere in space, perhaps in the creak of a chair or the

¹² Joujouka is a Moroccan Sufi Islamic musical tradition performed by the Master Musicians of Joujouka, a group Brion Gysin hired to play in his restaurant 'The 1001 Nights'. The music was formed of trance-inducing flute and woodwind drones and drum rhythms.

spark setting fire to the gas in the boiler. There are, within these 7 seconds, two ambient spaces, and listening to them both is the moment I become closest to the recording. The sense of the past that the recording evoked, through the sounds and the content of the voices, is no longer there and so the recorded ambience of the room sounds more present, more *new*, than the News.

I hear the sound of another passing emergency siren, this time on the recording, before the news cut-ups return overlaying the ambient sounds. At this point (3m06s) I hear a glitch in the continuity of ambient sounds within the recording revealing them to be as manipulated as the news recordings. This is shocking, the vision of the other space, imagined as a room in which Burroughs was operating his own reel-to-reel machine, and which felt so present in comparison to the previous broadcasts, has collapsed into a pre-recording. Once again the experiment has revealed a subjectivity: its own. The room of the recording process and its ambience appears a forgery that is just as subjective and prone to manipulation as the news stories, or the need for ice cream. This collapsing of ambient space in the experiment causes me to be more aware of the ambience of the room I am in, how the noise of the boiler and the movement of others complicates my listening to the experiment. I have two spaces, one that I have chosen to play into the other. Both have demonstrated a degree of instability, and this interplay and instability urges me to want to have these spaces interact more. I want to record and manipulate both spaces, blend them, and attempt to resolve their relationships through empirical means. The disruptions of spaces within the recording demand practical engagement.

A few seconds later the cut-ups cut into both the news and the ambient sounds for a brief moment. The experiment ends with a heavily distorted four second multiple overlays of news recordings. The return of the news broadcasts is in an overlaid cacophony. They have escalated into a panic, perhaps at their own inability to contain chaos, until little is decipherable.

I'm reading the sleeve notes to see if it is necessary for me to contextualise the experiment further. I feel that this is almost in an effort to refine the material, placing it into a specific time period to clear up the blur between the past and their presence. The sleeve notes document the date of composition as "early 1960s", however there appeared a reference to the death of a marine in the Dominican Republic (at 2m51s), the American forces presence in the area having begun late April 1965. A further extract from the experiment ran: "West Germany and Israel establish diplomatic relations" (2m10s) an

event that occurred on 12th May 1965. There are also references to President Johnson's address to the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists at the White House (0m15s and 1m59s) an event that took place on the morning of the 13th May 1965, making this the earliest possible date of composition.

13th May 1965 being the earliest possible date however has cleared up little other than the fact that the sleeve notes are very likely wrong, or at the very least misleading. The ambient recordings within the experiment could theoretically have occurred at any time up to the early 1980s when it was released. This level of detailed scrutiny seems important. It seems as though I am being asked to uncover some facts, perhaps some conspiracy involving ice cream and "Red China", but at the same time the sounds of the technician switching between sources suggest to me that it is not myself that is looking for meaning, but the manipulator of the recordings. Additionally the blurring of spaces, and the uncertainty of time, contributes to my inability to tidy-up the experiment, its context, and its potential (and political) meaning. The next experiment on the album begins immediately, and I close iTunes.

'Handkerchief Masks, News Cut-up' had the effect of playing with time, not transporting me through time, but through revealing its own temporal authenticity as either fugitive or fraudulent. This effect took place in part in the manipulation of the assumed present time, internal to the experiment, of the ambient sounds. Although they may indeed have been the present time of the experiment, their sudden manipulation made the ambient presence of the experiment unstable, and thereby emphasised the past-time nature of the material.

There exist gaps between factors inherent in the experience and the material of the experiment itself, the 1960s and the early 21st Century, the material of the magnetic tape and the digital simplicity for the user of the mp3 file, the geographical and cultural contexts. There also exist nodes of familiarity and contact, the principle connection being that of environment: Burroughs' room in New York, where this experiment was made, splicing in with mine in London through the emergency sirens, through my connecting of sounds on the tape with objects around me, and through the news broadcasts coming out through my computer, the vehicle from which I normally access the news.

All these connections however are subjective, the siren was coincidental, the objects are personal possessions, the news broadcasts of the time would not have come through the same medium as that which would have played the original experiment. I

outline these moments of connection because the experiment vehemently appears to expect that I find something within it, something fugitive. It explores the fugitive nature of spaces, making evident the movements between spaces of audial artefacts, the instability of pre-recorded environments, and the instability of meaning and understanding through the manipulation of words. Yet despite this, the earnest nature of broadcast news, and, following the ice-cream insert, the potency of broadcast media in general, suggests that the content is not presenting a soundscape in which the listener is directed to listen to the sounds as of themselves. The nature of the spoken material instead asks I find meaning, asks for understanding.

The first meaning suggested to me is that of a dualistic America under threat, of panic. However it is only through close listening and interpretation of two fleeting segments that I have come to this conclusion. It then becomes clear that the use, manipulation and juxtaposition of contextually-expressive material could have the effect of merely demonstrating that which was already there, namely that Burroughs was leaving the tapes running, allowing the material to reveal itself, to reveal its own inherent meanings via re-contextualising juxtapositions. However, as realised through listening, the experiment and the technician/experimenter are inextricable. The feeling that the exploration of material is the experimenter's and not the listener's furthers the hypothesis that these experiments are also exercises in self-exploration: an exploration of the experimenter's own feelings about, and responses to, the material in use. Perhaps the fugitive spaces and meanings of the recordings are present because Burroughs was trying to make sense of them himself, reflecting my own urge to physically engage with sound through empirical experimentation?

To further substantiate this hypothesis I will review another of Burroughs' released experiments containing news sources, 'Working with the Popular Forces' (circa 1965), in which Burroughs himself is more evident through the use of his voice. I will then go on to consider how some of the unreleased experiments reveal an understanding of Burroughs' concepts of self-examination and also clarify the challenges of their listening context and search for meaning and what they may reveal about a Burroughsian attitude towards sound. Unlike my review of 'Handkerchief Masks, News Cut-Up' I will attempt a removed reading, concentrating on the material itself rather than the material in its environment.

3.2.3 ‘Working with the Popular Forces’

‘Working with the Popular Forces’ published on *Break Through in Grey Room* contains many motifs familiar to Burroughs’ readers. It can be divided into four distinct sources that I will term Intro, News, Schultz and Noise. These sources, with the exception of Intro, are dispersed throughout the experiment, cut in with one another.

3.2.3.1 Intro

Intro begins the experiment and gives it its title. It is a 17 second section read by Burroughs, about the Popular Forces of the Viet Nam conflict. It runs:

Working with the Popular Forces, they are the dumbest, laziest, weakest, most unpopular I have ever seen. Captain Carlton J Holland, 36, made that comment in-

The recording is then cut for the first time.

In the context of the Vietnam War, the “Popular Forces” were a voluntary defence force formed to protect the civilian population of their home villages in South Vietnam. Research reveals that Captain Carlton J. Holland was an American advisor to South Vietnam, killed in February 1965 in Duc Phong. Burroughs teasingly omits the source of the attributed comment by cutting the recording at the point where the source may have been revealed. Incidentally his source is stated, in a slightly less abridged version, as a letter from Holland to his wife in ‘Cut-ins with Dutch Schultz’ (1965), released on *Real English Tea Made Here* (2007). ‘Cut-ins with Dutch Schultz’ was made around the same time and the source is likely to have been culled from Time Magazine, or other news press.

The missing citation suggests that fact verification is not important for Burroughs’ project.

3.2.3.2 News/Schultz

The News sources are extracts from news broadcasts, transcribed and narrated by Burroughs and edited and distributed throughout the experiment. To determine the origin of the news broadcasts, I repasted them together, un-cut them as it were, to reveal that they stem from the same story. The extracts appear to originate from media

coverage of a gas explosion in an apartment block in La Salle, Québec, in 1965 that left 23 fatalities and 5 missing (later confirmed dead). This story evidently held particular interest for Burroughs as it also surfaces in newspaper cuttings used in a collage made with Brion Gysin (*Untitled (Tornado Dead:223)*, circa 1965).

The difference in Burroughs' reading the news broadcasts, as opposed to their sampled manifestation in 'Handkerchief Masks, News Cut-up', is pronounced. For one thing it suggests the source of the news as print-based. Whether culled from a newspaper or magazine or transcribed by Burroughs, this re-reading implicates Burroughs in the experiment's potential results. It is his voice and its inflections that are a component object of study, as opposed to the voice and inflections of the American broadcast media apparent in 'Handkerchief Masks, News Cut-up'. This has the implication of the experimenter's reactions to the material being part of the material of study.

Lydenberg writes:

Burroughs' experiments with voice and sound can best be understood in the broader context of his theories about language. He views Western culture as ruled by a system of mass ventriloquy in which disembodied voices invade and occupy each individual. The basic pattern of such domination and control is uncovered by Burroughs in primitive and modern cultures alike: in primitive societies where the priest king rules by "produc[ing] his voice in the brains of his loyal subjects,"¹³ or in modern societies where the "mass media of newspapers, radio, television, magazines form a ceremonial calendar to which all citizens are subjected."¹⁴

Lydenberg 1992:431

Burroughs' concern about control through mass ventriloquism is, here, turned on its head. The ventriloquist of the mass media, performing like some Mayan calendar, here becomes the dummy. Burroughs inserts his scornful, guttural and, above all, visceral drawl into the words of the news reports, assuming the position of the controller. It is as if he is speaking through the mouths of the mass media, restructuring their words with his particular experimentalist emphases. Burroughs is turning the tables and re-writing the pre-recorded universe, attempting to counter the cycle of conditioned action.

The potential shifts in space and time when using his own voice are further exaggerated though the intermixing of the News with the Schultz source, again read by

¹³ Burroughs 1986:91

¹⁴ Burroughs in Odier 1970:44

Burroughs. Here Burroughs' deadpan reading of the news extracts contrasts with a noticeably more dramatic delivery. These sources contain readings from the transcript of the last words of Dutch Schultz, the alias for the early 20th Century American gangster Arthur Flegenheimer (1902-1935).

The transcript of Schultz's last words was taken in hospital by a police stenographer after Schultz was fatally wounded in a gangland shootout. During the transcription Schultz spoke in a stream of consciousness ramble that the police believed might reveal clues either to the execution attempt or other gang operations (Sann 1971). Burroughs was fascinated by the transcription as, according to Burroughs' biographer Ted Morgan, it "seemed to Burroughs a ready-made cut-up" (Morgan 1991:465). In Burroughs' own words it shared a "distinctive style" to cut-ups as well as "dream speech, schizophrenic speech" and Konstantin Raudive's recordings of paranormal voices on tape (Burroughs 1986:52). Although the material read is a document of an occurrence, it is also a blend of fact and fiction, of memories and hallucinations.

The two sources together, the News and the Schultz readings, create a surreal cut-up poetry, yet it is the shifts between the different reading styles of Burroughs' voice that evoke an interesting exercise in the manipulations of audial recordings. As if I were the experimenter listening back to these recordings I had just made, I have to imagine my own voice mixed in a similar fashion, displaced on a tape recorder and oscillating between the inflections of factual reportage and dramatic performance. Thus imagined, the experiment suggests a blending of styles of speech as a manipulation of the listener's assumption of their veracity in relaying information. The shifts from dramatic to factual and the deliberate or unintentional loss of the citation from the Intro section perform a merger of factual and fictional similar to those performed in *The Job*. It is as if the experiments are rhetorical devices, different from Burroughs' earlier intentions with the cut-up to present what he understood to be the reality of perception. The tape experiments thus far discussed appear more directed at revealing a different sort of meaning, the mechanisms by which humanity is, in Burroughs' mythology, being controlled.

However some aspects of the earlier project remain. As an exercise in investigating the relationship of words to experience, the use of Schultz's hallucinations alongside the factual reportage of the News extracts emphasises the subjectivity of a recorder of information. An example of the Schulz sections include:

...come on open the soap duckets...

...fire!...factory that he was nowhere near...it smoldered...

...okay, okay I'm all through can't do another thing...

These hallucinations act, for Burroughs as a ready-made cut-up, which, as I have articulated is analogous for Burroughs to the process of cognitive perception. Thus Burroughs' experimentalist approach to sound can be considered as analogous to my articulation of interacting with sound as presented in Chapter One, as a phenomenon for which hallucination is not a fringe subsidiary of the listening experience, but is bound up in all listening processes.

The mélange of real, media and foreign spaces of 'Handkerchief Masks, News Cut-Up' is in 'Working with the Popular Forces' reduced to a monologue, albeit still a disrupted and manipulated one that shifts between subject, expression and source. The only point at which the monologue, as inconsistent as it is, is externally disrupted is though sudden bursts of shortwave radio emitting electromagnetic noise, arbitrarily dropped into the experiment.

3.2.3.3 Noise

As raucous intrusions into the otherwise nondescript acoustic environment of Burroughs' various readings, the shortwave radio noise is comparatively jarring. It would be easy to explain the inclusion of this noise as being of merely aesthetic interest to Burroughs, as he describes radio noise in an article in a 1965 edition of the magazine *Bulletin From Nothing* (Reprinted in Burroughs 1984:56) with the words "most interesting sound on the air".

What is more likely however, due to the approximated date in which this piece was constructed and contemporaneous writing by Burroughs, is that the static could be an example of "irrelevant response" (Burroughs 1967: 212). Burroughs believed that the inclusion of "irrelevant response" such as noise, or other arbitrarily recorded sounds contextually divergent from the target material, was effective in breaking what he called "obsessional association tracks" when used in conjunction with specific sound recordings. (Ibid. 213)

In this case the proposed function for Burroughs of "irrelevant response" within the experiment would be to jolt the listener away from associations he or she might have been making from the proceeding content of tape recordings. Once more Burroughs is seeking to break the cycle of conditioned action, free himself from the prison of

causality, and open up realms of new possibilities. If the bursts of noise are intended to do this, then this could be regarded as a key example of Burroughs' experimentalism, disrupting any developing narrative in *his own* creations in order not to fall into the trap of conformed behaviours.

If I contrast this interpretation with my analysis of the Joujouka-esque noise of 'Handkerchief Masks, News Cut-Up', which I termed a clamour, then the use of "irrelevant response" produces a jolt that forces a previously immersed listener to recognise the preceding material's parochial, oppressive or otherwise subjective domain. In 'Handkerchief Masks, New Cut-Up' I felt the clamour had the effect of emphasising the flatness of the material and thereby destabilising its hegemonic influence over the experiment as a whole. As such the use of shortwave radio noise could here be acting to avoid the listener assuming the authority of the voice and its words. That is to say that the clamour of noise is there to disrupt any assumption of the experiment's stability. The consequence of this is that the experiments so far described may be considered always in flux, they do not assume a position but retain fugitive intention.

An alternative interpretation of the noise is suggested via a Burroughs text entitled 'It Belongs to the Cucumbers' published in *The Adding Machine* (1986). The text discusses Raudive's recordings of "unexplained voices on tape" (Burroughs 1986) in *Breakthrough*. Although *Breakthrough* was published some years after 'Working with the Popular Forces' was made, the phenomenon of finding voices in noise had been practised by Burroughs via his initial experiments with sound in the early 1960s, mentioned in Miles' biography (2000:256). Therefore it is conceivable that, prior to reading *Breakthrough*, Burroughs may have contemplated the "messages" in radio noise. However, as pointed out by Lydenberg, Burroughs assumed the sources of these messages were not the voices of the dead, but messages from "the 'memory banks' of the present experimenters" (Lydenberg 1992:431). This interpretation is not dissimilar to that which I formulate through reference to Bander's preface in Chapter One of this thesis.

If I follow this second interpretation, that the Noise segments might prompt messages from the "memory banks" of the experimenter, then they *contribute* to the texts read by Burroughs. They do this by forming material from which meanings may be elucidated by an experimenter who also happens to be the listener, just as the juxtapositions of words present new meanings. For Burroughs, his various readings of text, cut-up and interlaced, could reveal meanings regarding the experimenter's reactions

to the material read. So too could the shortwave radio noise contain information from the experimenter's psyche, much like divination through the reading of images in the random arrangement of tea leaves.

Regardless of whether or not these bursts of noise are there to elucidate random materialisations of meaning from the listener's subconscious, it should be clear that the use of arbitrary splicing techniques, noise and shifts in material presents an experimental listening environment as much as it does an experimental environment of creation.

The idea of the individual constructing the experiment being inextricable from the individual listening to the experiment helps to solve many of the challenges of attempting to find a listening position with respect to Burroughs' project. The issues of dealing with fugitive concepts and spaces become less problematic as the experiments create an environment significant for the listener for him or her to explore. In this manner the tape experiments mirror the text cut-ups in that they are examples of a proposed action that should be attempted by the listener.

If one assumes the role of experimenter, attempting one's own tape experiments, then the meaning-making process comes of aleatory effects and guides the project onwards, just as Raudive's questions to the voices of the dead herald their answers. Burroughs' insertion of "irrelevant response" perhaps being to ensure that this process does not collapse back into conformity.

As such, the construction of the experiments is a process of meaning-making, even if, for the listener to Burroughs' experiments it appears to be a process of the removal of meaning. The removal of meaning by the experimenter is the removal of a pre-existing meaning of the material in place of new insights for the experimenter, and perhaps the experimenter alone. A story in a news broadcast, for example, would have been created with a fixed meaning for the broadcaster to impart to his or her audience; Burroughs splices the story into new permutations seeking meaning in accordance with his own niche. Meanings therefore materialise not in the material itself, but in the interaction with the material of the listener/experimenter, a catalyst caused by the manipulative processes of the machine and the cognitive interaction of the active individual.

Katharine Streip, in her essay 'William S. Burroughs, Laughter and the Avant-Garde', suggests, "Burroughs's work [...] reminds us of the culture, politics and values that shape our responses" (Streip 2004:206). What these tape experiments do is to

remind Burroughs of his own conformity of responses and attempt to break out of the cycle of conditioned action in which they have imprisoned him.

These instabilities of meaning and intention, and the manifestations of subjectivity become even more prevalent when the listener moves away from the tidier arrangements of the releases of Burroughs' material, and begins listening to some of the unpublished experiments.

One might suggest that the released experiments have been selected for publication for the reason that they are most accessible for a listener. However in Burroughs' case such a criteria for selection is problematic. As I have suggested, the experiments appear to suggest the activity of investigation and discovery by the experimenter, and one in which fragmentation and the fugitive cohesion of spaces, time and meanings are explored. In Burroughs' case there is the likelihood that the less accessible they are for a listener, the more relevant they may be as examples. I will therefore review selected unpublished experiments in light of this.

3.2.4 'Her Primrose Laundry'

The British Library catalogue entry for 'Her Primrose Laundry' reads as follows:

Unpublished recordings made by William Burroughs and Ian Sommerville probably circa 1966. Tape opens with recording of unknown piece of orchestral music, with ambient room sounds, followed by off-air recording from TV, apparently 'Burke's Law' aka 'Amos Burke - Secret Agent'. CD-R tracks 8-14 feature Burroughs reading a cut-up text beginning 'Western Union telegram ... to all players' about a game called 'Her Primrose Office ... or Her Primrose Laundry' against a version of the same text running at a faster speed, over which Burroughs and Sommerville repeat the phrase 'Hello, yes, hello' as in Antony Balch's 1966 film 'The Cut Ups'. These elements repeated in various combinations, also juxtaposed with TV soundtrack, with echo effects etc. Left and right tracks recorded separately. CD-R track 16 consists of tracks 8-9 replayed at 9.5 cm/sec, to reveal Burroughs reading text beginning 'Alien mucus tumescent code train on Madrid ... ' - a more complete version of the 'Her Primrose Laundry' text

British Library Sound Archive catalogue entry for 1CDR0024393

The experiment begins with a recording from a vinyl record of what is, according to the British Library catalogue quoted above, an unknown orchestral music. The music is clear, and well recorded, but with a slight tic probably from a revolving record. At approximately 1m29s there is a crash and shuffle on the right channel. Apparently ambient movements continue through the background as the music continues: sounds like papers being shuffled, mechanical noises, a match strike (perhaps a cigarette being lit) and movements in a room all create an air of general activity, perhaps preparation, or at least the presence of another listener. I am now listening both to the music, and to a space. As the ambient sounds only exist on the right channel however, the demarcation of material refuses to create a spatial hierarchy and both are perceived as sources. At 5m11s the music comes to an end.

The length of the musical introduction is unusually long for Burroughs' experiments. Where music is present in Burroughs' experiments it appears either as very brief extracts or sped up. There is the internal noise of a switch between sources, and then, on the left channel only, the words "Amos isn't there anything anyone can do to help you", a female actress in the identified US TV drama series from 1965-1966 *Amos Burke – Secret Agent*, the follow up to *Burke's Law*. Amos Burke and the woman converse about a burn on the woman's hand caused by radioactive varnish on a statue she was making, set within a background of incidental music from the drama.

At 6m30s into the experiment the scene cuts off and the two channels continue at different speeds. The new material consists of readings by Burroughs. The text on the left channel is Burroughs reading the text recorded at 3¾ inches per second, whilst the right channel is recorded at 7½. This naturally has the effect of the left channel being sped up when the experiment is played at a speed commensurate with its remainder. Both tracks finish at the same time, the faster channel beginning at an earlier part of the text. Additionally the right channel contains a slightly different section at its beginning.

The text contains cut-up elements that appear in other experiments such as 'Silver Smoke of Dreams' from *Break Through in Grey Room* (1994). Other than these the text ends with directions for a game:

This is a game called 'Her Primrose Office'; also called 'Her Primrose Laundry'.

The game is played with three tape recorders. Tape recorder 3 can record on tape recorder 1 and 2. Neither tape recorder 1 or tape recorder 2 can record on tape recorder 3. In this position tape recorder 3 is set to be in the office or in the

The remainder of the text is indistinct, plunged into the background, as the foreground switches over to Burroughs speaking on the right channel and Sommerville on the left:

Burroughs: Hello yes hello [...]

At 8m30s the, now background, Primrose Laundry directions switch into the left channel only and return to the TV drama, whilst in the foreground the “hello yes hello” dialogue continues. As the Burroughs and Sommerville exchange utterances of “hello yes hello”, occasional giggles and background whispers can be heard, until at 11m52s Burroughs exclaims, “I think that’s enough”. We are left with the left channel of the American TV drama. Still on the subject of radioactive varnish, we find now though that one sculpture hides an atomic bomb.

125

tone of voice that gives the impression that he's realising Ian is getting out of hand and silly through fatigue.

At 17m02s the experiment switches back to the TV drama only on the left channel for the remainder of the experiment (5 minutes and 38 seconds) which basically ends with an English (UK) announcement for the next instalment of the drama.

To decipher the apparently odd juxtapositions of the TV drama and the orchestral music I go in search of their sources. First, I make a transcript of the extracts of the TV drama found in the experiment. From my transcript I look through synopses and video extracts to uncover the specific episode. I find that, far from being incidental television broadcast, the narrative of the two part episode from which the recording was taken ('Terror in a Tiny Town', 1966) is about a town brainwashed by subliminal tapes broadcast from a radio station. Comparing this discovery with Burroughs' texts of the time, in which his concern for the controlling potentials of tape machines is evident, suggests that this particular choice of television programme was thematically significant. Not only does it have the flavour of the pulp fiction narratives that run through Burroughs' literature, but also it is an almost flawless practical example of Lydenberg's synopsis that, as previous cited:

[For Burroughs] Western culture [is] ruled by a system of mass ventriloquy in which disembodied voices invade and occupy each individual. [...] where the "mass media of newspapers, radio, television, magazines form a ceremonial calendar to which all citizens are subjected."¹⁵

Lydenberg 1992:411

The material itself is so central to Burroughs' mythology that the "unknown piece of orchestral music", taking up, as it does, over five minutes of the recording, demands also to be identified.

With the assistance of Ian Wilson, Professor at Guildhall School of Music and Drama, I managed to determine that the piece in question was music from Act 1 of the ballet *Coppélia* by Léo Delibes, specifically the movements 'Valse Lente' and 'Czárdas - Danse hongroise'. In line with the identified relevance of the narrative of the extract from *Amos Burke – Secret Agent*, I will briefly mention that of *Coppélia*.

The narrative of the ballet, first performed in 1870, sees the toymaker Dr. Coppélius manufacture an automaton, Coppélia, with whom the hero of the ballet, Franz, falls in love, much to the consternation of his fiancée Swanhilda. The ballet was

¹⁵ Burroughs in Odier 1970:44

very loosely adapted from 'The Sandman' (German: Der Sandmann, 1816) a short story by German Romantic author E.T.A. Hoffmann.¹⁶

A basic knowledge of the ballet provides a number of suggestions that might inform the tone of the experiment and the music's use in the introduction to 'Her Primrose Laundry'.

Perhaps one theme of *Coppélia*, of relevance to Burroughs's tape experiments worth mentioning, is that of the confusion or blurring of identities. In the case of *Coppélia* the identities are those of Swanhilda and Coppélia, and their blurring occurs as Swanhilda becomes Coppélia to make Dr. Coppélius believe his creation has come to life. Although such a blurring of identities is otherwise not overtly present in 'Her Primrose Laundry' other experiments such as 'Silver Smoke of Dreams' and *Bill and Tony* demonstrate an intentional blurring of identities.¹⁷ In 'Her Primrose Laundry', the voices of Burroughs and Sommerville are distinct. They have been kept so distinct in fact that they occupy separate channels, right and left respectively. To me this suggests that there may be an alternative reading for *Coppélia*'s inclusion within the experiment.

Another theme present in *Coppélia* that may be relevant to Burroughs' project is the construction, anthropomorphism and control potential of machines. Coppélia could be read as analogous to the tape recorder, in that the latter has, for Burroughs, the potential to be an extension of the human nervous system that could be seen as an imitation of the human through vocal mimicry. The implication is that experiments with tape somehow imbues the tape machine with life, as Dr. Coppélius attempts through the transference of the soul of a drugged Franz into a doll.

Burroughs makes the assertion in *The Third Mind* that "Shakespeare [and] Rimbaud live in their words. Cut the word lines and you will hear their voices. [...] Certainly an improvement on [...] contacting poets through a medium."¹⁸ (Burroughs 1979:32). Burroughs is suggesting that the voice of an individual, like the soul of Franz, might be transplanted into the machine through experimental processes and such activity might release new life. In the case of the tape recorder or the cut-up text, this new life

¹⁶ Incidentally Hoffmann's Sandman was a case study for Freud's development of his concept of 'the uncanny' via his similarly titled 1919 essay.

¹⁷ 'Silver Smoke of Dreams' has Burroughs' and Sommerville's voices blended in with each other, whilst in the film *Bill and Tony* Burroughs and Antony Balch become one another through superimposing each other's voices over their images.

¹⁸ Although this argument is evidently naïve in its belief that the literary output of either may represent their, for want of a better word, souls, it is worth noting that the two individuals in question do both boast relatively sparse biographies outside of their literary achievements and therefore that the closest one is able to get to either Shakespeare or Rimbaud is via their works.

could be read as new permutations of the voice through the possibilities of the machine and the activities of the experimenter.

This interpretation of *Coppélia*'s inclusion might also have resonance with Burroughs' project at the time, particularly in his interest in cognition and machines, and might act as convincing grounds for his interest in the opera. It also chimes with Lydenberg's summary of ventriloquy in Burroughs. It does not yet make a completely convincing case for the opera's specific inclusion in 'Her Primrose Laundry', however it does enhance the context of the "hello yes hello" segment in an assumption of the mystical empowerment of the tape machine and therefore, for Burroughs, a potential, almost eugenic, intensification of the smudging of communication.

The third theme apparent in *Coppélia* is the control of people through the use of automata, Dr. Coppélius having painstakingly built a collection of these in his workshop. On one level Coppélia controls Franz through her beauty, and on the other Dr. Coppélius has constructed a town of characters under his will. This theme is particularly convincing in terms of the opera's inclusion in 'Her Primrose Laundry' when compared to the presence of 'Terror in a Tiny Town', which, as mentioned, concerns a town of people controlled by subliminal tapes broadcast from a radio station, and also chimes brilliantly with Lydenberg's synopsis of the voice and sound in Burroughs' project.

Additionally, as quoted above from the text of the experiment, the game of the experiment in which Tape Recorder 3 can wash and record on Tape Recorders 1 and 2 from an office, completes a thematic link of control through use of automata, acknowledging the tape recorder as anthropomorphic through its vocal mimicry and as "externalized section of the human nervous system" (Burroughs 1967:213).

This "game" also appears to share similarities with Alvin Lucier's later work *I am Sitting in a Room* (1969) in which he records himself narrating a text, playing the recording back into the room, re-recording it, and playing it back until the room frequencies resonate in the room to the extent that the spoken text is obliterated by their becoming the resonant sounds of the room it is being performed in. However the "washing" is far more indicative of Burroughs' suggestion of the tape recorder as an extension of the human nervous system and, through his interest in Dianetics and Scientology, its potential to "clear" the individual of obsessional behaviours, as I shall examine later in this chapter.

Added to my previous insights, the implication of the game as some sort of system of control might suggest 'Her Primrose Laundry' as an exercise in thought

control. However it is not apparent that the negative connotations of thought control are paramount in the project's outcome or indeed its listening. Instead the impression is that of the study of the "basic communication formula" and the potentials of the tape recorder to control and manipulate the cognitive interaction of the technician with his or her own psyche and that of some other listener or subject. As such it appears as an investigation of cognitive and communicative processes through externalisation of such processes via audial automata. The bookending of *Coppélia* and 'Terror in a Tiny Town' to 'Her Primrose Laundry' therefore suggests Burroughs' experimentation with "basic communication" as an attempt to divine, for the experimenter, potential controlling or manipulative dynamics within external and internal cognitive interactive processes when either activated or amplified by recording and playback technologies.

Finally it is also worth noting that the inspiration for *Coppélia*, *The Sandman*, has, as its protagonist the character of Nathanael, a character struggling with post-traumatic stress and torment that leaves him trapped in a state of flux between reality and hallucination. Burroughs, as an obsessive reader, may well be aware of this, and it chimes perfectly with the transitions between the factual and fictional as discussed in my analysis of the previous experiments.

The sources *Coppélia* and 'Terror in a Tiny Town' both appear to have been included in 'Her Primrose Laundry' for thematic reasons. Yet, at the same time, the clues to their inclusion are far from obvious, they have been buried in the experiment and in some cases I have had to access material not present in the experiments to uncover the thematic connection between both sources and the experiment. In essence I have pinned down fugitive meaning by accessing omitted material, that which the experiment is not.

Through his construction of the experiment Burroughs has obscured vital material for a deeper reading of its themes. This obfuscation suggests two interpretations. The first is that Burroughs is assuming a broad and detailed cultural knowledge of his listener, a listener who makes the connections between the sources and thereby is able to contextualise the remaining material. However it is becoming more and more apparent that the listener is the experimenter, which, in this case, means the listener is Burroughs himself. The first interpretation therefore implies the assumption of an intended communicable message that simply is not there in the case of listener/experimenter.

The second interpretation is that their inclusion is an alchemical mixture of materials, an inclusion of subliminal magical or ritualistic significance. Relevant themes

have been explored through the inclusion of choice materials, in this case *Coppélia* and ‘Terror in a Tiny Town’, that, in accordance with Burroughs’ belief in a magical universe, might provoke some external effect. To pursue what this effect might be I shall analyse a fourth experiment, which also appears to involve alchemical use of audial material, before looking more closely at Burroughs’ understanding of the potential paranormal power of the technology of the tape machine.

3.2.5 ‘WSB and IS. Stereo Experiment’

An interesting example of the inclusion of an almost alchemical use of material occurs in an unpublished experiment rather prosaically entitled ‘WSB and IS. Stereo Experiment’¹⁹ (circa 1965). The experiment makes use of two different tape speeds prompting the British Library to provide two playback copies, the first at 7½ inches per second and the second at 3¾ inches per second.²⁰

The catalogue notes at the British Library describe the following:

Unpublished tape experiment made by William Burroughs and Ian Sommerville, ca. 1965, presumably in London. Left channel features Sommerville reading various texts, some by Burroughs, possibly material from ‘Nova Express’, also voice of Burroughs. Right channel: pop music (Johnny Cash, Simon and Garfunkel), room sounds etc., and voices of Burroughs and Sommerville. Right channel recorded at two different speeds.

The majority of the experiment, beginning with an inching process²¹ occurring at 5m24s, appears to be a very basic collage of two mono recordings. Ian Sommerville reads Burroughs’ texts that switch back and forth between channels, whilst the other channel plays ambient sounds or readings by Burroughs. Despite its simplicity it contains sounds that separate and recombine clear recordings of voice, environment, and sounds of physical manipulation (inching and what sound like hands moving microphones). This section of the recording sounds like a simple experiment in communication and space. This is made evident at 11m30s when Sommerville starts reading a text that implies that the cutting of two recordings together can create sexual stimulation between the two individuals involved. He also likens the recording process to the administration of a

¹⁹ Initials standing for ‘William Seward Burroughs and Ian Sommerville.’ Original recording catalogued at C1156/8 with the playback copies referred to above catalogued at 1CDR0024388.

²⁰ 19 cm per second and 9.5 cm per second respectively.

²¹ A scratching sound created by running the tape back and forth across the tape heads.

drug. Here the experiment appears to be exploring the activity of tape manipulation as sexual activity via a “smudging” of voices.

Like ‘Her Primrose Laundry’ however, a seemingly unrelated introductory section prefigures this activity. Prior to the inching noise, the right channel of the recording has been recorded at a variable speed, both $7\frac{1}{2}$ and $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches per second. It contains Burroughs and Sommerville, ambient sounds, and recordings of Simon and Garfunkel’s live performance of ‘Homeward Bound’ from *Simon and Garfunkel’s Greatest Hits* and Johnny Cash’s ‘Arkansas Lovin’ Man’ and ‘Papa was a Good Man’ from the album *A Thing Called Love*.

Once again, the archival reliability of Burroughs’ experiments is thrown into doubt. The inclusion of the songs by Simon and Garfunkel and Johnny Cash contradict the “ca. 1965” date of the experiment by a considerable margin as both albums weren’t released until 1972. As both albums were released in the same year however, this makes 1972 a likely year in which to place ‘WSB and IS. Stereo Experiment.’²²

Whilst the right channel of the introductory section plays, the left channel, at a constant $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches per second, contains Sommerville and Burroughs reading Burroughs’ texts. Listening to the experiment at $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches per second, the sped-up music on the right channel appears as comical in the fast twittering rendition of a familiar and serious song. Themes of nostalgia and family, permeate the lyrics of ‘Homeward Bound’, ‘Arkansas Lovin’ Man’ and ‘Papa was a Good Man’, although at high speed these are hardly decipherable. They take place however alongside the left channel readings that thematically also contain essences of nostalgia.

Suddenly at 2m07s (listening at $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches per second), there appears approximately 30 seconds of noise, sped up Joujouka music on the right channel and ambient noise sounding like an aeroplane on the left. Like in ‘Handkerchief Masks, News Cut-up’, the interruption is menacing in its otherness.

Referencing back to my consideration of the contextual shift in listening prompted by my observations whilst listening to ‘Handkerchief Masks, News Cut-up’, the dual speed recording amplifies the gulf in interaction with differing technologies. In the digital format available on either the British Library sound server or the playback CD, ‘WSB and IS. Stereo Experiment’ becomes two different recordings entirely. This

²² Although recordings of ‘Homeward Bound’ was first recorded in 1965, and Cash played ‘Arkansas Lovin’ Man’ in the late ‘60s, it is highly likely that Burroughs would only have access to recordings widely accessible in London at that time, particularly in the case of the live recording on *Simon and Garfunkel’s Greatest Hits*.

separation is further exaggerated by each recording being split into a differing number of tracks (two for the naturally shorter 7½ inches per second version, and three for the 3¾ inches per second version).

This unreleased experiment exemplifies the instabilities of meaning and intention in its production, and provides a technological problem for the contemporary listener. Like ‘Her Primrose Laundry’ there is almost a declaration of intent. Yet whilst ‘Her Primrose Laundry’ contained material that was thematically consistent with the whole, yet concealed, ‘WSB and IS. Stereo Experiment’ contains a strange homage or invocation of nostalgia that may or may not be connected to the alchemical attempt to produce sexual excitement through technology. The themes of nostalgia are there in the lyrics, but the speed has obscured them, making them available only to someone with a memory of the material. There is something missing from our understanding, whether deliberately concealed, merely not included, or smudged out due to their not being, once again, a relevant audience other than the experimenter.

If the experiments are heard as having a magical or alchemical nature, then there might be nothing missing at all, extracts remain of powerful sources, subliminal like an audial homeopathy. The themes and purposes for a source’s inclusion within a specific experiment exist, but as the material is cut and mixed again and again they become obscured through process. In a sense, the themes are discarded to enable the recording to remain fugitive with material changing meanings to remain consistent with Burroughs’ attempts to present techniques of illusion and parody against control of conditioned action.

At a 2008 screening of Howard Brookner’s *Burroughs* (1983) I questioned Barry Miles, a close associate of Burroughs in the 1960s and ‘70s and one of Burroughs’ biographers, as to his opinion of the status of these experiments. His reply was that they should be understood in the same context as his paintings, scrapbooks and cut-ups as a “means of investigation”. Miles’ answer merges the contexts of the experiments with Burroughs’ visual work and the writing mechanism of the cut-ups. What Burroughs’ tape experiments seemed to demand in retrospect was a critical engagement that embraced their practice and their form as engagement with materials: sound as resource.

Consider Burroughs’ shotgun-blast paintings, made by either discharging various firearms into spray cans or other containers positioned in front of boards, or by firing into the wood itself:

When I am painting, I see with my hands. [...] When I make the shotgun-blast paintings, I am usually not thinking about the painting but about hitting the can. I line it up, and you get this explosion of color. Then the gun whams against your shoulder, but not hard at all.

Burroughs in Ellis 1990:198-201

Burroughs, in this interview, describes first a synaesthetic interaction with process in which his hands become the primary means to view his production, and then a bionic interaction that is with the process only. Even after the “explosion of color” Burroughs still appears fixated by his interaction with the gun, its force against his shoulder; it is the process that appears paramount, and the results less important. As with his cut-ups, the act committed, Burroughs would scan for effects or results, however it is, in both cases, the process by which these effects or results were achieved that are highlighted by Burroughs in his discussion of these various methods of “investigation”.

How does this help to draw inferences on the tape-recorder experiments in light of Miles’ assertion that they occupy a similar context of production as the painting works? Firstly it gives a convincing cause to the lack of care and preservation by Burroughs of his experiments. It is necessary to travel; it is not necessary to live: if the end recording itself is not the focus but merely an interesting by-product of the process then there is less reason for careful archiving. In this case the processes may be retained for subsequent development, whereas the effects of their application can be considered rather more incidental. Following Miles’ comparison of the tape experiments and the paintings, the tape experiments suggest the value of the activity is perceived as being in their making and in any effect of this, random or magical. The value is not perceived in the existence of the results as a rationale for their production.

Burroughs’ tapes therefore may occupy a creative domain of interaction between pseudo-scientific experimenter and abused technology, a domain of ritual, not of product, with the experimenter inextricable through being the very subject of the experiment. Results and values are produced through the experiments through the interaction between the experimenter and the technology and may be considered meaningful in the manner of Clarke’s affordances: as “environmental opportunities” for the listener.

The recordings contain frequent repetition, re-ordering and re-use of material; the cuts between sources seem determined, yet imprecise, appearing at random points, for example mid-sentence, yet employing sources that are far from mundane such as

Joujouka music, emotive fantasies, interviews, news broadcasts and other evocative texts. Burroughs use of evocative material (news broadcasts, his own texts and those of others, Schultz's last words), alongside the imprecision of his methods, has the effect that the listener cannot ignore the potential presence of an important message. Yet simultaneously any message is intentionally obfuscated, or "smudged", by arbitrary intervention.

One gets the sense from listening to the recordings that Burroughs is using technology for that which it was not intended, the misuse or abuse of technology as a reaction to the pre-recorded to achieve results that are paranormal or magical. This corresponds to Ted Morgan's suggestion that Burroughs' belief in a magical universe as of singular importance with regards to his ideas and practices (Morgan 1991:595). Burroughs' tape experiments, outside of the esoteric magical universe identified by Morgan as being so significant to Burroughs, are fascinating audial collages in their own right, but they are impossible to divorce from the magical ritual of their genesis, and are, us such, vestiges of purpose.

The experiments are a "means of investigation" not a final project. As such they invite unending investigation, Burroughs calls for his audience to try the experiments for themselves. To return to the closing pages of *The Ticket That Exploded*, the inclusion of Gysin's calligraphic gesture and the 'the invisible generation' section are crucial advocacies of action, of *new* projects. 'the invisible generation' includes the following:

any number can play
yes any number can play anyone with a tape recorder controlling the soundtrack
can influence and create events [...] you need a philips compact cassette recorder
handy machine for street recording and playback [...] the first step is to isolate
and cut association lines of the control machine carry a tape recorder with you
and record all the ugliest stupidest things cut your ugly tapes in together speed up
slow down play backwards inch the tape you will hear one ugly voice and see
one ugly spirit is made of ugly old prerecordings the more you run the tapes
through and cut them up the less power they will have cut the prerecordings
into air into thin air

Burroughs 1967:205-215

At the end of *The Ticket That Exploded* when the narrative of the text has folded back into itself into silence, Burroughs makes this call for audial action, to the recorder of voices, the machine at the heart of his practice: 'The tape recorder proposed as a device for

tackling the control machine and breaking the cycle of conditioned action.

Burroughs' project is governed by his sense of reality as a "prerecording", and in the attempts of like-minded individuals to resist or negate this process of living in, what he refers to as, a prerecorded universe run by the control machine. Prerecording for Burroughs is the constant repetition of ideology, sometimes defined through association with a monotheistic religious system (as referred to in Burroughs 1987:113). A Burroughsian attitude is seeking a contrarian position to the order of a prescribed pattern. As such Burroughs' project has modernist overtones, with elements of evolution as the means of approaching an ideal creative space through the realising of unrealised potentials. Investigation of experimentalist activities is the process by which this point is realised.

This use of the tape recorder recalls my previous articulation of the routine as an audible act, bound to its vocal origins, as a tool for the emancipation from control. Burroughs' creative practice appears to become actively bound up in a self-medication for possession:

I am forced to the appalling conclusion that I would never have become a writer but for [Joan Vollmer]'s death, and to a realization of the extent to which this event has motivated and formulated my writing... The death of Joan brought me in contact with the invader, the Ugly Spirit, and manoeuvred me into a life-long struggle, in which I had no choice except to write my way out.

Burroughs 1985:18

This self-medication did not come only through writing, however, but also through adopting techniques Burroughs came across such as Reich's Orgone Therapy for which Burroughs would sit in a box specially designed to focus "Orgone Energy" for hours at a time. Similarly Burroughs would obsessively make use of the E-Meter, a device used by the followers of the Dianetics and Scientology procedures of L. Ron Hubbard, a device that formed part of Hubbard's mythology of freedom from invasive forces.

Some of this approach to self-medication could take itself from Burroughs' failure with psychiatry. Writing to Jack Kerouac about Ginsberg's attempts to go on a "take-our-place-in-normal-society dive" he suggests the possibility that analysis may have "fucked him up permanent and reconstructed him in their own dreary image" (Burroughs in Harris 1993: letter dated 1952). It is evident from this that Burroughs held a dim view of psychiatry, which he regarded to have also failed him (Morgan 1991:73-74).

Thus Burroughs would seek alternative approaches in an attempt to avoid negative mental states and behaviours.

Among the material Burroughs plundered for routes to freedom from control was the popular self-help literature of Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* (1937) and Hubbard's series of books on his "modern science of mental health", Dianetics. Introduced to Hubbard's writing once again by Gysin, it would become a significant influence on how Burroughs' would go on to articulate his project, and the links between Hubbard's therapeutic activities and Burroughs' smashing of the control machine would become intimately entwined. I shall demonstrate how Hubbard's writings had a profound bearing on the interpretation of Burroughs' activities with tape and therefore his post 1950s attitudes towards sound and how they offer a relevant parallel for the articulation of my insights regarding Burroughs' use of the tape recorder.

In 1961 Burroughs was about to release the first edition of *The Soft Machine*, the first cut-up novel, the first part of a trilogy exploring the cut-up in the format of a science fiction narrative, and Burroughs' treatise on the human body. As suggested by the title, *The Soft Machine* defined the human as analogous to a machine of flesh, something programmable and manipulable. For Burroughs, eradication of the Burroughsian Time-Binding virus of language would require reprogramming of the soft machine. Looking at the abstractions of the cut-ups and Burroughs' condemnation of language from the perspective of self-medicating perceived psychological issues, one could deduce that Burroughs is not trying to find a source from which to analyse his perceived entrapment in time. Instead he appears to be looking for an obliteration of the past, of any cause and effect, of any trauma that might have a restrictive impact on his actions and future options. Burroughs occasionally mentions past trauma (the shooting of his wife and a mysterious incident involving his nanny in, for example, Burroughs 1985:14 and Morgan 1991:31), but he appears more concerned with escaping the obstacles towards a freedom beyond the restraints of physical and mental obstacles.

Burroughs' involvement with Dianetics and Scientology is significant for a discussion of Burroughs on sound firstly because of how it provided experimental solutions to real problems but also due to how it responded to Burroughs' activation of the voice, in the way that it emphasises the vocal procedure of *auditing* as the most common solution to obstructions.

3.3 Dianetics and Scientology

“He views Western culture as ruled by a system of mass ventriloquy in which disembodied voices invade and occupy each individual.” (Lydenberg 1992:431)

Lydenberg’s quote about Burroughs could just as easily be about Hubbard’s origin story for the human race and their ongoing efforts to combat the obstacles in their lives. According to Hubbard, human beings have been invaded by Thetans, spirits that maintain an on-going influence on an individual’s psychological state and its freedom of behaviour.

In the mid-1950s Gysin had come to associate himself with two wealthy American devotees of Hubbard, then a science fiction author turned self-appointed authority on mental health (Geiger 2005:108-9). Gysin introduced Burroughs to Hubbard’s theories of mental wellbeing and how to attain it. Burroughs both supported and denounced Hubbard and his work for many years. He would become convinced that Hubbard’s project necessitated “serious consideration” (Burroughs 1972:15) whilst also dismissing it as “a series of manipulative gimmicks” (Burroughs in Knickerbocker 1965).

I will discuss the importance of Scientology and Dianetics for Burroughs, an importance much underrepresented in critical work on Burroughs (with the exception of Douglas Kahn’s brief essay on the subject ‘Cellular Phones: Corporeal Communications Technologies in William S. Burroughs and L. Ron Hubbard’).

Despite his conflicting opinions of the movement, Scientology was at times a significant source of ideas and practices for Burroughs. It is probable that one of the aspects of Hubbard’s project that attracted Burroughs was the analogy of man as a being hampered by recordings of unconscious perceptions that “possess ‘inexhaustible’ sources of power to command the body” (Hubbard 1988:10). Burroughs’ feelings of being physically dependant on opiates, a dependency with very physical symptoms, at the time of being introduced to Dianetics coupled with Burroughs’ contemporaneous interest in drug addiction as a metaphor for control would no doubt be partly responsible for his interest in such an idea.

Additionally Burroughs had demonstrated an interest in comparing a concept of biological fatalism with his own personal predicament. Franz Kafka’s ‘In the Penal Colony’ (1914) at that time already held an interest for Burroughs and in a 1952 letter to Allen Ginsberg, (collected in Harris 1993:140) Burroughs quotes the section from ‘In the

Penal Colony' in which a machine writes a man's sentence into his flesh. In the section the man then deciphers the sentence, not by reading, but through feeling the legibility of his wounds. This reference could be regarded as an early apparition of Burroughs' paradigm of the being trapped in time by word and image, forced to perpetuate preconditioned actions, for, as in Burroughs' mythology of causality, Kafka's "Condemned" (Kafka 2000:205) has his inescapable future written into him. Hubbard's concept of human beings as recording devices would therefore have its precedent for Burroughs in Kafka's Condemned and resonate with his fear of a preconditioned control through presenting human beings as recording devices on which conditions can be inscribed.

At the point of the letter to Ginsberg, Burroughs' theory of escape from the inevitability of preconditioned behaviour was yet to mature and he would require a more effective system through which to theorise the possibility of complete liberation from control. However Burroughs' letter to Ginsberg is an early mention of a writing machine associated with both control and with the physical body that would come to typify Burroughs attitude to the potential power of creative practice as a practice of negotiating freedom.

If Burroughs' reference to Kafka's machine betrays the embryonic formulation of his theories of the individual, of control and of freedom I will argue that it is through Hubbard's Dianetics and Scientology, systems, which, like Kafka's Machine, deal with inscriptions written into the flesh of the individual, that these ideas reach maturity. In this section I will investigate the transition of the machine from Kafka's text via Hubbard's influence to demonstrate how this matured into Burroughs' new understanding of creative manipulation and freedom from past conditioning, and what relationship this understanding has for Burroughs' understanding of the meaning-making process, of the tape recorder, and of sound.

As mentioned above Kafka's condemned man deciphers his sentence "with his wounds" (Ibid.). Therefore it is through experience of his body that the Condemned understands what is to happen to him and why. Importantly this destiny is controlled from without, a concept Burroughs felt reflected his own feelings of powerlessness at the time he wrote the letter referencing Kafka. In the introduction to *Queer* (the introduction was written in the 1980s, 30 years later than the novel itself) Burroughs clarifies this position, writing:

My concept of possession is closer to the medieval model than to modern psychological explanations, with their dogmatic insistence that such manifestations must come from within and never, never, never from without. (As if there were some clear-cut difference between inner and outer.)

Burroughs 1985:15-16

Also in that introduction Burroughs makes an overt reference to 'In the Penal Colony' by describing his experience of writing *Queer*: "While it was I who wrote *Junky*, I feel that I was being written in *Queer*" (Burroughs 1985:12), simultaneously suggesting he is becoming more and more aware of being a slave to conditioned behaviours.

In Burroughs' letter to Ginsberg, and in a section in *Queer* in which Lee²³ dreams he is in a penal colony, Burroughs is Kafka's condemned man being written. He implies that his sentence is being written into his flesh by a machine operated by others. Burroughs' reference to Kafka here demonstrates his principle position towards his situation and his apparent powerlessness to *the word* (as Burroughs saw it via Korzybski) on his flesh. This revelation appears also in the introduction to *Queer* in which he describes his "need to escape from possession, from Control" through attempting to "write [his] way out" (Burroughs 1985:18).

This introduction was written much later than the period from the late '50s to the mid '70s in which, I argue, Burroughs formulated his theories in terms of a pursuit of freedom. At the time of the Kafka letter the road to freedom was not so clear.

In the letter from 1952, in which he references Kafka's machine, Burroughs documents his feelings that he had no hope of emancipation from the control of his desires and was therefore unable to control his destiny. This could then be regarded as fertile ground for a system such as Dianetics that not only promised freedom from "psychoses, neuroses, compulsions and repressions [or] psycho-somatic ills" (Hubbard 1950:8) but also operated outside of accepted science, or as Skerl describes Scientology "a pseudoscience [or] panacea [that] appeals to the popular mind" and as such "suits Burroughs's style of thinking and creating" (Skerl 1985:38).

The trope of man as a machine on which conditions are recordable is a required concept for Burroughs' developing theories of the potentials of liberation from preconditioned behaviours. Burroughs' use of technologies, it should be emphasised, were not in accordance with their invented usage but with a pseudo-scientific one. Like the cutting of the page in the cut-up, and Harris' observation of the nature of Burroughs'

²³ Lee is Burroughs' alter ego in some of his novels, Lee being his mother's maiden name.

experimentalism, Burroughs' technology is one that misuses technology in order to produce results inconsistent with how the pre-recorded universe is expected to play out. Alternative uses of technology allows for the idea that these conditions and behaviours into which Burroughs believed human beings were trapped might be erased. Such an approach also explains the assimilation of the self-help dicta of Dianetics and Scientology into his project, dicta he was to rely on heavily in an attempt to rewrite the programming of his own machine.

The period in which Burroughs was absorbed by Hubbard's religion there exist his most definite ideas on how one may attack or escape the confines of the Burroughsian Time-Binding, approach the state of Burroughsian Space-Binding and achieve liberation from what he regarded as a cycle of condition action. Much of his methodology derives from a definitively Burroughsian appropriation of Hubbard.

Not unlike much of Burroughs' oeuvre, Hubbard's writings are prone to be both esoteric and grammatically eccentric. Hubbard frequently redefines accepted terms and coins neologisms whilst occasionally surprising the reader with lapses of colloquialism. Hubbard's Scientology, and the self-help system of Dianetics before that, constructs a panacea²⁴ around spiritual arcana, indeed it seeks to create an all-encompassing system for its disciples on "how to go from 'zero to infinity' in personal awareness and ability."²⁵ This methodology, according to Skerl's account, results in a system of thought that has the potential to reveal that which is being suppressed by the dominant cultural order (Skerl 1985:38).

One of the most obvious similarities between Hubbard's early writing and Burroughs' developing theories of the nature of reality and control is found in Hubbard's *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* (1950). This book describes the principles of Dianetics, Hubbard's precursor to Scientology and his attempt to create a paradigm shift away from techniques and understanding presented in psychoanalysis and psychiatry.

Dianetics describes the necessary steps that need to be taken to achieve the level of "clear". According to Dianetic theory a clear is an individual who displays no "psychoses, neuroses, compulsions and repressions [or] psycho-somatic ills" (Hubbard 1950:8) including, according to Hubbard's interpretation of psychosomatic, such illnesses as the common cold.²⁶ Hubbard declares that such an individual also achieves higher than average intelligence and "pursues existence with vigor and satisfaction" (Ibid.).

²⁴ To borrow Skerl's term.

²⁵ Publisher's endorsement on the back of Hubbard L. R. *Scientology 0-8: The Book of Basics* (1988)

²⁶ An indication of how Hubbard's project was on the way to becoming a theory of everything.

Burroughs' previous failures with psychiatry and his interest in evolution to human potentials would likely have drawn him towards Hubbard's system as an alternative for the betterment of mental and physical performance.

Further similarity between Burroughs' theories and Hubbard's Dianetics occurs in Hubbard's supposition of a cellular memory of individuals. Hubbard suggests that individuals retain imprints called "engrams" in a cellular "mind" that cause negative behaviour or interactions, but what is particularly interesting also through Hubbard's description is his analogy between these mysterious imprints that trigger conditioned actions and the media of recording technology:

[Engrams] are like phonograph records or motion pictures, if these contained all perceptions of sight, sound, smell, taste, organic sensation, etc. [...] An engram can be permanently fused into any and all body circuits and behaves like an entity.

In all laboratory tests on these engrams they were found to possess "inexhaustible" sources of power to command the body.

Hubbard 1950:60

Thus Hubbard's engrams conform both to Burroughs' concurrent fears of possession and conspiracy of control, and his analogy of a man whose actions were pre-determined by a Kafkaesque writing machine, as well as his then burgeoning interest in the associations between recorded media and internal psychological processes. In essence Hubbard's theory of engrams is significantly similar to Burroughs' pre-recorded behaviours.

When Burroughs described psychiatry as "take-our-place-in-normal-society dive [...] in their own dreary image" (Burroughs in Harris 1993: letter dated 1952) it is evident that he was actively resisting conformity. Thus it is likely that he found attractions to Hubbard's assertion that a clear is an individual who, rather than being successfully adjusted to function well in society, is unrepressed from the control of engrams. In Burroughs' case, the successful individual did not need to conform to a heterosexual norm governed by a single morality, but could release themselves from his hypothetical control manifest in internal needs and desires. In this respect Hubbard's engrams, written into the body circuits and employed to "command the body", become quite easily translatable into Burroughs' word and image script of the pre-recorded that keeps humanity locked in Burroughsian Time-Binding.

3.3.1 The E-Meter

In addition to the concepts of the body as a device on which things may be recorded, the most prominent elements of Hubbard's dicta that appear in Burroughs are centred around the E-Meter: a lie-detector with a skin galvanometer circuit similar to a Wheatstone Bridge, and the proposed purpose of its use: the elimination of the "reactive mind".

In his booklet *The Book Introducing the E-Meter* Hubbard introduces the E-Meter prosaically as "a device to measure the amount of resistance to the flow of electricity" (Hubbard 1966:1). He proceeds to describe that a body that is "inhabited" as opposed to a dead body, has a much wider divergence of electrical resistance and that such resistance is caused by an individual's emotional state, "his thoughts, etc." (Ibid. 3-5). The device passes "only half a volt" through the body of an individual grasping two "cans", and measures the result via a needle that can be adjusted for sensitivity (Ibid. 9-28). Various behaviours of the needle, according to Hubbard, are indicative of various psychological responses to the questions of an analyst, known in Scientology as an auditor. As Lewis describes it:

To Scientologists, the changes in the E-meter measure changes in the mind and tell what the pre-Clear's mind is doing when the pre-Clear is induced to think of something, though its indications must be interpreted by a trained auditor.

Lewis 2009:22

Burroughs was to use an E-Meter for many years as a way of understanding unconscious blockages to freewill and as Burroughs cites Hubbard's theory of the reactive mind of "serious consideration" (Burroughs 1972:12).

Hubbard describes the reactive mind thus:

The reactive mind is that portion of the mind which files and retains physical pain and painful emotion and seeks to direct the organism solely on a stimulus-response basis. *It thinks only in identities.*

Hubbard 1950:39 (original emphasis)

The reactive mind in Hubbard controls the individual against his or her wishes. He dictates how mastery over the reactive mind could lead to mastery over an individual's inner space and control over physical process such as heart rate, brain waves and sexual response. It directs the organism solely on a basis of stimulus-response that, for Burroughs, could be analogous to the flesh addictions of drugs, sex and power.

This mind, the apparent source of a plethora of illnesses and all psychiatric ones, becomes part of Burroughs' paradigm of control that is both external and internal. For Burroughs the external forces of control (whether "boards syndicates and governments of the earth" (Burroughs 1964:3), "the Ugly Spirit" (1985:15-18), or a myriad of other generalised hegemonic groups) and the internal systems that modify behaviour (addictions to sex, drugs and power, the reactive mind) are connected through the former's exploitation of the latter in the form of viral possession (through word and image). Burroughs hijacks the concept of the reactive mind as the embodiment of a malicious code with which the establishment controls individuals' responses. Like Hubbard, Burroughs seeks the elimination of these controls to achieve "complete freedom".

Taking Hubbard's concept of the reactive mind, Burroughs hypothesises the ability to command the body to the degree of controlling brain waves. He suggests a population capable of emitting waves from the body that cause effects including "epileptic fit waves [...] sex waves [...] pot waves [...] peace, love and beauty waves [...] any waves you like." (Burroughs 1972:20-21) This hypothesis, appearing in the Los Angeles Free Press in 1970, mirrors the tone of the articles 'Invisible Generation' (Burroughs 1966), 'Feedback From Watergate to the Garden of Eden' and 'Electronic Revolution' in *Electronic Revolution* (Burroughs 1970) all of which refer to viral and guerrilla technologies for the dissemination of emotions or effects.

In the first of these articles, 'Invisible Generation', Burroughs revises the paradigm of the soft machine referring to a tape recorder being "an externalized section of the human nervous system" (Burroughs 1966:213). From this point these other articles adopt the sound wave as the means of causing numerous effects similar to those suggested by the mind waves he develops from Hubbard.

Rather than functioning as attempts to control others, however, the use of such waves is suggested for "altering addictions" in reaction to Burroughs' beliefs that such techniques "were undoubtedly being used for this purpose by official agencies" (Burroughs in Miles 2002:156).

Burroughs' vision is of a population armed with wave emitting powers or technologies for the alteration of their selves and environment, an empowered population freed from a reactive mind and thereby immune to the efforts of external control. What Burroughs' flirtation with Scientology emphasises is the development of the early paradigm of need (addictions to drugs, sex and power) into an internal control

mechanism of the reactive mind and its associations with word and image. Whilst Hubbard's E-Meter purports to read the resistance of engrams in the reactive mind, Burroughs' cut-ups, and later his tape-recorder, similarly become tool for the erasure of a pre-programmed reactive mind.

Comparing Burroughs' 'the invisible generation' call to arms with the tenets of Scientology reveals how closely the Burroughsian tape recorder and Hubbard's E-Meter actually are in purpose. For the tape recorder Burroughs writes, as previously cited, "carry a tape recorder with you and record all the ugliest stupidest things [...] the more you run the tapes through [...] the less power they will have cut the prerecordings into air into this air" (Burroughs 1967:217). Compare this with Lewis' analysis of the E-Meter auditing process:

Negative memory records are thought to possess an actual mass and so offer resistance to the electrical charge. The E-Meter is used during auditing sessions to identify resistance created by negative memory records. The auditor assists the practitioner in eliminating negative memory records by first locating points of resistance, converting the form that they take into energy, and then discharging that energy. When a stored emotional charge (negative memory record) is identified and is discussed sufficiently (audited), it will no longer produce an emotional response (the charge it contains will be released), and the E-Meter needle will "float" (it has been cleared).

Lewis 2009:94

Lewis adds "Scientists find a unique salvation in the auditing process, a confessional of conscience and a pathway [...] to enlightenment" (Ibid. 202).

Firstly there is the evident similarity in the clearing process, both involve the running over and over of material until it no longer produces an emotional response, or in Burroughs' terms, no longer retains the capacity to produce conditioned action.

Secondly both offer a path to freedom. In the case of Scientology the technology is claimed by Hubbard to help the user obtain the level of "clear" a level in which the user is no longer bound by their conditioned responses, or engrams. This is almost identical to Burroughs' mythology of space, in which the cut-up technique, and the tape experiments beyond that, is proposed as technologies for revealing the point at which the complete liberation of space can be negotiated.

Both the E-Meter and the Burroughsian tape recorder suggest means by which the individual may disrupt the conditioned behaviours that hold the individual enthralled

by the control, in Burroughs' case, as picked up by Deleuze and Guattari, the dominant order (See Deleuze 1988). To some degree Burroughs suggests a transcendence of subjectivity from the limits of the physical body through the replication of the nervous system in the external. However the key process is the running of material through the machine, for "the more you run the tapes through and cut them up the less power they will have cut the prerecordings into air into thin air" (Burroughs 1967:217).

The principle aim of Dianetics and, consequently, the nexus of Scientology, is its role as an alternative response to issues of mental health. Hubbard regarded psychoanalysis as the "grandfather" of Dianetics and Scientology (Hubbard 1956:1) however psychoanalysis was to become a focus of criticism by Hubbard and the Church of Scientology. One of the more direct early critiques appears in a series of bulletins written by Hubbard in 1956 entitled *A Critique of Psychoanalysis*. In these bulletins Hubbard takes a profoundly negative view of the development of psychoanalysis: "psychoanalysis [has] been superseded by tyrannous sadism, practiced by unprincipled men, themselves evidently in the last stages of dementia" (Hubbard 1956:2). His colourful language imagines an environment in which:

Men who call themselves analysts are merrily sawing out patient' brains, shocking them with murderous drugs, striking them with high voltages, burying them underneath mounds of ice, placing them in restraints, "sterilizing" them sexually'

Hubbard 1956:2

A vignette that would not be out of place in a Burroughs routine. It should also be noted that this particular bulletin, in which Hubbard comments on Freud's "racial fixation" with sex, is also one indication of the racism and anti-Semitism that runs through Hubbard's work and that characterises some of his criticism of psychiatry.²⁷

Hubbard, like Burroughs, took issue with what he perceived in psychoanalysis as its operation as tool of interpretation by the analyst. The first section of *The Auditor's Code 1954* is entitled "DO NOT EVALUATE FOR THE PRECLEAR" (the "preclear" being the subject of Dianetics techniques). It goes on to say:

[T]he phenomena which occur, must not be "telegraphed" to the preclear before they occur, and when something has occurred to the preclear the auditor should not then come up with its explanation. This was the entire failure of

²⁷ On the subject of sexuality it should also be noted that Hubbard at this time took a decisively negative view of homosexuality which he classes as a deviation of a desire to rear children, an "illness" of the "pervert" and "extremely dangerous to society" (Hubbard 1950:103).

psychoanalysis. The preclear would say something, and the analyst would then tell the preclear what it meant.

Hubbard 1954:1

As Dianetics, as a replacement to psychoanalysis, presents one of the many mid-century anti-psychiatry movements, such as that found in R. D. Laing that sought to rearrange the focus of diagnosis. In the case of Dianetics, the proposal was that the preclear be the source of evaluation guided by an auditor. For Burroughs, as an advocate of self-medication and libertarianism, Dianetics, at least as presented to the public, seemed like a method for psychological scrutiny and as a means to “write my way out” of his life-long struggle with perceived psychic invasion (Burroughs 1985:18).

The nature of the auditing process acts as a sort of confessional in which the preclear is guided through his or her memories looking for moments of resistance, at which point the e-meter registers a fluctuation in a small electrical current. Once such moments are found it is the job of the auditor to run these moments through the process again and again until the e-meter no longer registers. As such Burroughs' tape machines operate in a similar manner running through bad memories and arguments (“all the ugliest stupidest things”) until: “the more you run the tapes through and cut them up the less power they will have cut the prerecordings into air into thin air” (Burroughs 1967:215). As a means of obliterating past guilt and, perhaps, culpability for events, Burroughs' project therefore also includes confessional elements.

As a solution to the problems of individuals like Burroughs, Hubbard set Dianetics and Scientology up as a panacea that evolved into a doctrinal acceptance of Hubbard's beliefs including evidence of homophobia, with homosexuality classed as a perversion and a physical illness (Hubbard 1950:103). As such it should have presented the kind of ideological system that Burroughs was fighting against, however Hubbard's advantage was to draw on individuals that were looking for an alternative system to cure the human condition. In my interview with David Gaiman, head of the UK branch of Church of Scientology before his death in 2009, he recalled the atmosphere at Saint Hill Manor, the head office for the Church of Scientology in the UK, as follows:

The people who come into Scientology are usually in need of change, a demand for improvement. That was certainly true for me. My wife came in because she wanted to help people. She trained for several years as a pharmacist, worked in University College Hospital, had a degree, and thought, “this stuff doesn't handle the human condition.” In the sixties, a lot of flower-power people, a lot of

people would meet each other on the way to the Himalayas, I mean I remember the Swedes and Danes in their sandals and long hair, smoking their pot up on the hill at Saint Hill.

Gaiman 2008

Such an atmosphere, and one in which Scientology was regularly getting vilified in the mainstream press, may have aided Burroughs' naivety in adopting its tenets so unquestioningly at the outset. Come 1970 he was to adopt a more critical approach, particularly in relation to Hubbard's hegemony (see Burroughs 1972), however he retained belief in the basic principles of Dianetics until his death.

To consider Burroughsian concepts of Space-Binding and a mythology of liberation alongside the mythology of Hubbard is to consider an ideal of autonomy from preconditioned interpretations. In returning to Lydenberg's description of how the tape experiments are suggested as a "cure" from the "viral infection" of "word and image" (Lydenberg 1992: 413) one can see how the auditing procedure of Scientology might be described using very similar terms. As such the tape recorder in Burroughs' mythology occupies a far more practical domain of production than it might be given credit for. As much an instrument that responds to the magical universe as the E-Meter is a religious artefact.

3.4 Burroughs' Recordings as Not-Artworks

In this writing about Burroughs' activity it will have become clear that I have hitherto taken the decision to avoid defining the experiments as either *artworks*, or even just *works* despite this thesis being undertaken for the purpose of elucidating a curatorial strategy in audial art. I do this in response to Burroughs' own assertions that his production is not meant as such. Although he allowed them to be later released in a commercial domain as an artistic product, Burroughs' refuses to consider the idea that their production involved artistic practice.

Attempts at curatorial fidelity to Burroughs' project is fraught with contradiction. At once an attempt to reveal what is really happening, what Burroughs saw as "montage" reality of perception through the cut up for example (Burroughs 1986: 61), and simultaneously an attempt to divert control from the dominant order by destabilising and rewriting reality, Burroughs' project both attracts and resists ideas of finitude. Burroughs' fugitive approaches and unresolved theory are at once attempts to achieve

authenticity and an unresolved critique of the authentic. As such my approach to Burroughs from a curatorial perspective is to invite, and be comfortable with, a degree of contradiction between these elements. There is evidently a degree of unavoidable conflict in approaching Burroughs from a curatorial perspective and Burroughs' claims that the tape experiments were not an art proposition is one example of how such conflict manifests itself.

In this section I will describe how it is the not-art status he grants the experiments that on the one hand might reveal a conservatism in Burroughs with regards to artistic production, whilst on the other allow for the extremes of radical experimentation that makes these experiments so appealing as examples of audial art production half a century after they were produced.

One explicit example of this position is evident in a taped conversation between Burroughs and his editor and assistant James Grauerholz (1953-). Burroughs makes it apparent that the tape experiments were not something he considered to be works of art:

Grauerholz: "How did you see the place of the work you were doing in 'art' so to speak?"

Burroughs: "Well we weren't thinking about art, we were thinking about alterations, and the, shall we say, the potentialities of the tape recorder for altering addictions, and how they were undoubtedly were being used for this purpose by official agencies."

JG: "Did you view the work you were doing primarily as experiments then?"

WSB: "Yes."

JG: "And not really works?"

WSB: "No, no, no, they weren't supposed to be works. It was not an 'art' proposition at all [...]"

British Library Sound Archive catalogue number C1183/21, my transcription
This extract of conversation is part of a discussion about a then forthcoming release of Burroughs' experiments. However the tape experiments that have been published were done so through the activity of individuals other than Burroughs: Genesis P-Orridge, John Giorno, and Colin Fallows among others. Burroughs himself appears to have held little concern even for their survival. Accordingly one might also consider that there was never any intention for an outside audience whether these experiments might be considered art or not. Burroughs' statement is repeated almost verbatim (Burroughs appears to have had a habit of verbatim repetition), quoted by Barry Miles in his

biography of Paul McCartney:

I did a number of experiments with [Brion Gysin's Uher tape recorder], lots of them with Ian Sommerville following Brion's experiments, all sorts of cut-ups, musical cut-ups and sleep recordings. They weren't supposed to be works, it was not an art proposition at all.

Burroughs in Miles 1997:240

The status of these recordings is, however, not so clear-cut when compared to other known facts about their origins. The potential for Burroughs' use of the tape recorder was suggested by Brion Gysin, an artist, to replicate the cut-up experiments he and Burroughs had been conducting with texts. Additionally Burroughs, in a 1966 interview, mentions the tape recorder in connection with potential "literary purposes" (Burroughs 1979:2-3). Through these observations we can make the assumption that Burroughs was potentially aware of the tape recorder as a tool for producing artworks from the very beginning.

What is interesting is that the awareness of the potentials of the tape-recorder for his own artistic practice suggests the decision that his experiments *not* be considered as artistic works was likely to be a deliberate one. If the intended context of his tape manipulation activities was *deliberately* non-artistic, then the consequence for my listening and reviewing of Burroughs' tape experiments is that I am forced to consider the experiments as existing without the standard interactions of artist, artwork and visitor. I have to consider the tape experiments as activities unconcerned with aesthetics and artistic intention and context. The context of this activity in both practice and theory needs to be considered first however.

Much has been written on the relationship of Burroughs' activities to modernist and postmodernist trends in literature and the arts. Lydenberg presents a case for Burroughs' cut-up method (and, by implication, its audial off-shoots) as being an extreme, emblematic illustration of the postmodern obsession of intertextuality in how it "make[s] explicit the intertextual nature of all discourse and all human experience" (Lydenberg 1987:55). Likewise Timothy S. Murphy presents a convincing case for Burroughs' intertextuality that "not merely [...] escapes covertly the constraints of fully self-present meaning, but an explosive *intermediation* or scrambling of all codes faster than capital, subjectivity, or language can resuscitate them" (Murphy 1997:232). By drawing Burroughs as a schizoanalytic figure, as Murphy does, what is interesting is that at the point at which figures such as Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari start to take the stage in

the English-speaking world, such as the infamous Schizo Culture event at Columbia University in 1975 (see Lotringer & Morris 2013), Burroughs was gravitating away from the experimentalism of the cut-ups and tapes and preparing to move back towards linear narrative. It is as if Burroughs retreats from this new attention and the challenge of intellectual scrutiny. Understanding both Burroughs' cut-up project and his tape experiments as not just generative but also self-analytical tools, more in line with popular science and Dianetics than with either modernist or postmodernist discourse, makes his retreat from experimentalism more comprehensible than if it were only part of a philosophically-informed strategy. However it is also Burroughs' failure to apply or develop theory, observed by Harris (Harris 2003:38), that not only make his tape experiments interesting aberrations, but allow them to resist distinction of genre and, perhaps paradoxically, further support the claim of intertextuality.

As part of Burroughs' move back towards linear narrative, he would describe how even his most experimental novels were heavily edited and contrived in order for them to be readable. As such, the literary manifestations of his cut-up texts were not as radical as they are sometimes assumed to be. This is a consequence of Burroughs' own efforts to ensure the cut-ups made sense from a formal perspective and corollary frustration when the cut-ups eluded that formal intelligibility. Where his practices appear more radical is precisely in areas that were not intended for publication: his tapes, notes and collages. The problem therefore of considering Burroughs' activities with tape as a result of other artistic and literary histories lies in Burroughs' use of non-written text as an extension of his interest in non-art domains for their own non-art value. His use of Hubbard's Dianetics as a source for his investigations is a case in point. Whilst, for Burroughs, his activity with tape owes more to Hubbard, there are interesting parallels that were taking place in other artistic activities that may well have allowed him to validate his activity as something more than an experimental novelty. Burroughs was using this material straight, as it were, as a "science of mental health" rather than for any artistic or aesthetic value, and yet it is the artistic and aesthetic values that develop through his application of this material that appear to be the focus of to creative practitioners his activities have inspired. The aesthetic of the cut-up might be seen to precede its original purpose.

Burroughs' activities do, however, have a significant resonance in the arts, and indeed are to be presented in this thesis as a project appropriate to creative practice.

Therefore I will briefly contextualise his activity with some contemporaneous instances where artistic analogies might be useful.

Burroughs' articulation of his project as not-art can be traced through similar not-art or anti-art gestures in the history of art and visual culture. The cut-up, whilst it was supposed to have appeared spontaneously to Burroughs through his observation of an arbitrary accident of Gysin's, might also be said to have benefitted from historical precedents, and this potentially validated the methodology in Burroughs' eyes. Burroughs acknowledged precedents to the cut-up with particular emphasis on Tristan Tzara, Dos Passos and Duchamp (see Robinson 2011:6-8). Additionally, Murphy observes some of the technical traces of Burroughs' activity with sound as evident in contemporary musical pioneers such as the inching and permutation techniques having comparable manifestations in the work of Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio, Milton Babbitt, Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry (Murphy 1997:216-217). It is also probable that Burroughs' interest in the idea of meaningful messages in broadcast noise came from his fascination with Jean Cocteau's film *Orpheus* (1950) which plays a crucial, if understated, role in *Queer* (Burroughs 1985:48:49).

Comparing Burroughs' not-art proposition to Joseph Beuys amalgam of art and life can result in an interesting emphasis for situating his activity conceptually. Both individuals were involved in the fictionalisation of their own biographic details through an active confusion of epistemological and metaphysical concepts in their approach to ideas. As such, Burroughs' tape experiments could be considered a life proposition that is then subsumed back into art by his collaborators (such as Gysin through performances, Balch through the film works and P-Orridge through the publication of the tapes on LP).

Burroughs' project also developed at a time when the boundaries of art, both in the visual arts and in music, were being tested in terms of what art might or might not be as a domain. The Fluxus movement had provided an arena in which art practices were both intermingled and posited as anti-art propositions, and individuals such as Henry Flynt were combining concerns of language, sound, art and concept in ways that might have made Burroughs' fringe activities more digestible.

Flynt's avowal to having stopped making art from 1962 onwards places his subsequent cultural activities (including experimental music compositions) in an interesting context in relation to Burroughs' not-art statement of intent. The crucial difference between such activities however relates to a key relationship between art and

the activity of making. Whereas Flynt's relationship to art is to challenge it through going "beyond art" (Flynt in Adlington 2009:40), Burroughs' concern is not with art at all. For Burroughs his activities with tape were undertaken from a life proposition, that is for the purpose of self-help, self-medication or betterment. Any use of, reference to or similarity to artistic activity would be, if we take Burroughs' not-art statement in its clearest form, entirely irrelevant to the experimenter's own intent.

Likewise the tape works of John Cage, such as his algorithmic cut-and-splice tape work *Williams Mix* (1951-1953), the tape music of Halim El-Dabh and the musique concrète of Pierre Schaeffer et al. might appear relevant in form. However, in terms of the purposes to which such works were put, and therefore contexts from which we might be expected to ascertain meaning, they are very different.

Schaeffer's project was firmly focused on the articulation of music and listening to music as an art form, an activity that had fewer practical implications than those Burroughs' imagined for tape. El-Dabh's interests appear to be more spiritual and were focused on separating and emphasising the qualities of sounds to create an "inner sound" (El-Dabh in Holmes 2012:48). Likewise his investigatory activity has Burroughsian overtones in its attempt to penetrate some hidden properties of sounds and voice contained within their expression. Cage's interest in Eastern philosophy would form his interest in music as a means to imitate nature and provide opportunities for "the sobering and quieting of the mind making it susceptible to divine influences" (Cage in Duckworth 1999:12) and as such could be compared to Burroughs' self-help ideas, particularly in terms of their debt to Dianetics. However both El-Dabh and Cage's use of the artistic domain of music as an activity through which to assist "a changing mind" (Ibid.) contrasts with Burroughs' avocation of sound and tape technology in a domain he imagined to be scientific (as pseudoscientific quasi-psychoanalytical activity), with an ultimate precedence of function over aesthetics. Even when Burroughs mentions Cage directly and in the context of his tape experiments he does so in reference to the potential use of music as an active material rather than a domain in which he himself is operating and refers to Cage as doing that which Burroughs is doing in writing, i.e. within the art form, rather than as analogous to Burroughs' activities with tape (Burroughs in Odier 1970:18). It is as if such an analogy wouldn't have even occurred to him due to the tape experiments' not-art status.

Perhaps a more appropriate analogy within an artistic context (although not contemporaneous with Burroughs) might be made through reference to the assimilation

of outsider art projects within curatorial practices, such as the self-medicating therapy of Mark Hogancamp's *Marwencol* project (see Malmberg 2010). Attacked by a group of men in 2000 for his transvestitism, Hogancamp was left brain damaged and physically disabled. Hogancamp responded to his physical and psychological trauma by building a 1/6-scale fictitious town with complex revolving narratives set during Nazi-occupied Belgium. The narratives of the town run repetitively over events that bear a distinct relationship to the incident in 2000, and the characters involved in the incident and subsequent characters from Hogancamp's recovery are given specific alter egos. The work itself is posited both as an exercise in psychological readjustment from trauma and as a means of playing out of desires as if to manipulate real-world events, as is the case with Burroughs' project.

Like Burroughs, Hogancamp allows the project to be relocated within an art context. Hogancamp's photographs and parts of his town are relocated within an art gallery, whilst Burroughs' "not-art" statements come during his telephone conversation with Genesis P-Oridge during the latter's curation of the *Nothing Here Now But The Recordings* LP. The difference between such activity and the anti-art or not-art gestures identified above is that the project begins outside of the art context and then is adopted by it, Duchampian in the sense of being a readymade claimed by a curator.

The implications of this are that applying formal values of artistic appreciation in an attempt at some kind of ontological artistic validation might be considered disingenuous to the nature of the coming into being of the material being assessed. For example, a comparison between Cage's *Williams Mix* and Burroughs' tape activity would need to take into account the wildly different affordances of their intention, on the one hand a musical proposition and on the other an exercise in quasi-psychiatric self-analysis and/or the creation of paranormal effect. However, as in the case of Hogancamp's *Marwencol* project, the evaluation of such material in an artistic context might, as I shall demonstrate, reveal more about the games with meaning-making and their relationship to concepts of affordance and the cognitive niche than a more consistent relationship between artistic practice and exhibition context.

This is not to say that Burroughs' activities with tape did not feed back relatively quickly into the world of electronic and tape music. Among the artists who took an early interest in Burroughs' activities in a manner that superseded their merely formal or aesthetic qualities was Gordon Mumma whose composition *Megaton for William Burroughs* (Mumma 1962-1965) directly responds to Burroughs interests as well as the means by

which he was exploring them. Using a mixture of unmodified tape recordings, including those sourced from other material and live sounds from non-musicians equipped with contact microphones, Mumma explored audio hallucination, political critique and the explicit manipulation of sound and their temporal and spatial connections through the activation of body and technology as mediator (Adlington 2009:175). That said, Mumma's interests were more directed at the manipulation of the audience and the transference of the work's theme than self-directed experiments on cognition and conditioning.

This assertion of the recordings as not artistic yet experimental might suggest that they be evaluated through each recording's ability to produce some determined quantifiable discovery of effect. One example is the "Playback" activity previously mentioned, one example of which Burroughs' undertook in London outside the Scientology Centre had the effect, according to Burroughs, of forcing the organisation to move premises (Miles 2002:182). Evaluating his experiments with regards to eccentric claims such as this can be read as both futile and fantastical. Such evaluation must rely on metaphysical and paranormal phenomena accepted on the basis of Burroughs' authority alone.

Returning briefly to my analysis the tape experiments emphasises specific insights when understood as not-art propositions. The obfuscation of material begins to make considerably more sense if not included with the intention of being deciphered by an almost superhumanly culturally aware audience.

On the other hand, my comparison of the tape recorder to the E-Meter and 'the invisible generation' section of the revised *The Ticket That Exploded* suggests that the experiments could be most convincingly read as processes for running over obstacles, whether internal or external, although significantly, for Burroughs, there is not some "clear-cut difference between inner and outer" (Burroughs 1985:18). In this regard the material on Burroughs' experiments might be read as representing obstacles in his life at that time.

Another aspect of the tape experiments becomes of particular interest when read as devices for running material clear. Whilst discussing the tape experiments I have occasionally mentioned the perceived presence of artefacts relating to nostalgia. This might appear at odds with Burroughs attempts to break free of Time-Binding constraints, however both Burroughs' interest in Dianetics and Scientology and the previously cited passage from 'the invisible generation' at the close of *The Ticket That*

Exploded might reveal more about the nature of the pervasive nostalgia of Burroughs' tapes. I shall now briefly consider an idea of Burroughs' relationship with memory and nostalgia in terms of how it might fit with the tape experiments as I have described them.

3.5 Outside East St. Louis in the dominion of aging roots, ten-year-old keeping watch – Cracked pool hall and vaudeville voices made this dream – distant coffin between the mirrors of time that meanwhile i had forgotten²⁸

When listening to the recordings they carry with them both the weight of subsequent audial exploration of sources and techniques, and the sounds of a time. They are frequently dry and unemotive, but display a strong sense of the past both for the contemporary listener: recordings of recognisably mid 20th Century accents and broadcast media, compounded by the familiar tape hiss and recording quality.

On the one hand this can be easily dismissed as an effect of contemporary listening to past materials but this overwhelming feeling of nostalgia and the past is also frequently present in the narrative of the recordings themselves. Within the recordings, Burroughs' texts mention smells, dreams and sexual encounters, narrating stories or fragments of stories that evoke nostalgia. Examples can be found on published recordings such as 'Silver Smoke of Dreams' on *Break Through in Grey Room* (1994) and 'We Are the Night Family' from *Real English Tea Made Here* (2007).

In some recordings it is a nostalgia that Burroughs frequently makes explicit such as in 'Word Falling, Photo Falling' from *Nothing Here Now But the Recordings*: "He has gone away through invisible mornings, leaving a million tape recordings of his voice behind". This emphasis on nostalgia and memory appears distinctly at odds with Burroughs' project, as previously described, being an attempt to escape the constraints of Time and eliminate past conditioned behaviours. It seems instead that Burroughs is wallowing in the past, playing it through again and again.

In light of my analysis of the comparison between the E-Meter and the tape recorder, such replaying brings with it a different meaning. As non-art objects not intended for an audience, they become much more personal records of nostalgia, and could represent Burroughs running through material to determine points in which he can escape conditioned action, freeing himself from the past. The re-use of material on

²⁸ Burroughs 1967:67

subsequent tape experiments, much of which moves back and forth from written text to tape recording, seems to support this view.

In relatively early Burroughs there also exists direct connections between nostalgia and memory as an environment that can be manufactured and manipulated to order (Burroughs 2006:7). Considering Burroughs' killing of his wife as a catalyst for his project, such a memory, alongside the belief that one's memory can be manufactured and manipulated, might indeed throw one "into a life-long struggle" (Burroughs 1985:18) to escape the past: a "lifelong preoccupation with Control and Virus." (Ibid.)

Additionally this new relationship to the nostalgia in the tape experiments to Burroughsian Time-Binding alongside the experiments as not-art, suggests a relationship between the experiments and the cut-ups that might resolve the experiments own relationship to time. By this I am referring to the experiments' own paradox of actualisation similar to the cut-up paradox of appearing in the linear culture of the written page. In terms of the tape experiments this paradox is the Time-Binding nature of sound itself, ticking from second to second; sound, sound recording and the voice are made possible by the phenomenon of time.

The tape recorder experiments were not intended as art propositions but were experimental projects tied to specific needs at certain times. Therefore the fact that so much of the material has been lost is perhaps understandable. Instead they are more convincing as products of quasi-Scientology procedure and magical rituals. In Chapter Two I articulated how the paper-based cut-up technique in its ideal form is material in perpetual cut-up that perpetually muddies a Burroughsian Time-Binding order of linear narrative. As a not-art proposition, and never packaged or repackaged as such by Burroughs himself, the tape experiments are even more free to operate in this manner. Like the cut-ups they are in perpetual revolution through Burroughs' advocacy of the continuation of the project by others. Although it is time that makes the use of sound possible, the temporal linearity of sound is not what is at stake here but the action of rearranging its temporal linearity as an ongoing activity to avoid cause and effect.

As such the tape experiments offer, for Burroughs, indications of the point at which freedom from Burroughsian Time-Binding and condition action might be negotiated:

look around you look at a control machine programmed to select the ugliest
stupidest most vulgar and degraded sounds for recording and payback which
provokes uglier stupider more vulgar and degraded sounds to be recorded and

play back inexorable degradation look forward to dead end look forward to
ugly vulgar playback tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow what are
newspapers doing but selecting the ugliest sounds for playback by and large if its
ugly its news [...] only way to break the inexorable down spiral of ugly uglier
ugliest recording and playback is with counterrecording and playback

Burroughs 1967:215-217

It is revealing here that Burroughs quotes Shakespeare twice in this final section of *The Ticket That Exploded*. First *Macbeth*, notably his final soliloquy “tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow” (Act V, Scene V) in which he determines that life is analogous to an actor who “struts and frets his hour” as if bound by manufactured struggles, and secondly Prospero in *The Tempest*²⁹ in his cutting into his own staged pageant to remind its audience that it is just illusion and, in a metaphor for the world around it, will be destroyed by time “and, like this insubstantial pageant faded, leave not a rack behind” (Act IV, Scene I).

Both quotations by Burroughs concern themselves with death, and, for Burroughs, “death needs time for what it kills to grow in” (Burroughs 1990, track 4) so the serious nature of Burroughs’ polemic against time is evident. They also seem to address Burroughs’ muddying of fact and fiction, his “nothing is true, everything is permitted” prerecorded universe. Burroughs captures two incidences from Shakespeare that express the notion that reality is a performance or theatre that can, perhaps, be rewritten. The inclusion of such carefully selected hints as these in, what is essentially, a how-to guide on taking the experiments out into the world is revealing of how much Burroughs considers the world to be a performative and manipulable simulation.

The implication is of Burroughs’ use of memory and nostalgia being replayed over and over to obliterate causality. The experiments’ reliance on nostalgia is not that they are *about* memory, nostalgia or the past, but that they are motivated by the freeing of the experimenter from the conditions of its legacy.

²⁹ Lydenberg spots the latter of these two borrowings but does not expand upon the relevance to the theme (Lydenberg 1987:94)

3.6 Conclusion “The Recording is Incomplete and Cuts Off Abruptly”³⁰

I have considered Burroughs’ tape recorder experiments in accordance with my articulation of Burroughsian meaning developed earlier in Chapter Two. In Burroughs’ mythology Burroughsian Space is a goal in which the individual is liberated from conditioned action and control. The negotiation of space Burroughs articulates as an activity involving the disruption of associations caused by Burroughsian Time-Binding structures such as language. Miles’s suggested status of “means of investigation” is precisely that: an investigation of roads to space, to liberation. Thus Burroughs employs the cut-up technique and the tape experiments as way to engage with meaning-making as emancipation from conditioned actions and interpretations. In my comparison between the tape machine and Hubbard’s E-Meter, I have demonstrated how this process is also bound up with Burroughs’ self-medication. I have then related this to how such readings are affected by Burroughs’ apparently definitive assertion that the tape experiments were not made as an art proposition at all.

Within this chapter I have considered Burroughs’ tape recorder experiments and determined the apparent factors of experimenter as subject, obfuscation as a strategy towards plurality of meaning, and technology as a device through which one may restore or reveal multiplicity.

I have described examples of how Burroughs approached sound through his experiments, using it as the content for technology. Firstly Burroughs’ approach appears to consist of audial technology is as a mediator or vehicle for self-examination, and secondly as a tool for the examination of the world. Both methods are undertaken as part of Burroughs’ search for a “cure” from the “viral infection” of “word and image” (Lydenberg 1992:413).

In Chapter One I considered an interpretation of sound art as audial art. My definition accepted sound as something that has a relationship with the entire cognitive body and includes hallucination and mistaken cognition as implicit components of the meaning-making process.

From this starting point I have demonstrated how Burroughs’ use of sound is aware of a whole body effect (the sexual stimulation of ‘WSB and IS. Stereo Experiment’, for example). I have described how, for Burroughs, the meaning-making process is

³⁰ From the notes to C1156/25 Side 1: ‘Keith Modigliani interview w/WSB for ‘Gay Sunshine’ c. 1972 preceded by a few cut-ups and a brief talk with Antony Balch’. British Library Sound Archive.

bound up with the magical universe in a manner in which sound (via the experiments) can be used to see a different universe, one that is, for Burroughs, closer to the facts of perception than the one conventionally described.

I have discussed Burroughs' resonance in sound, specifically popular music, and then detailed Burroughs' relationship to meaning and sound in ways that involve the sensibilities of pulp science fiction, the self-help work of Hubbard, himself a science fiction writer, and Burroughs' experimentalist relationship to theories such as Korzybski's semantics and concepts of time and space, and in Burroughs' inspiration by Gysin.

I have considered how the cut-ups' ultimate representation as linear narrative, and the tape experiments' relationship to the linearity of temporal listening is seen not as the failure of the project but as the beginning of their audiences' activation. I have demonstrated how Burroughs offers a decentralised notion of authorship, both through collaboration and through his stipulate that to really understand the techniques and experiments he proposes one must undertake them for oneself: the cut-up project is about active participation.

In Chapter One I suggested a loose category of curator who defines all factors of exhibition making as bound within his or her own motivations and affordances. In this ecological approach to curatorial practice, the audiences' involvement in the meaning-making process can likewise be considered as a niche-oriented cognitive behaviour and any understanding of their cognitive interaction must acknowledge hallucination, synaesthesia and morphological sites of engagement as components of artistic exchange.

This approach ties in with Burroughs' understanding of meaning as a fugitive process. To reprise Burroughs' glossary to *Junky*:

It should be understood that the meanings of [the words in the glossary] are subject to rapid changes [...]. The hip sensibility mutates. [...] Not only do the words change in meanings but meanings vary locally at the same time. A final glossary, therefore, cannot be made of words whose intentions are fugitive.

Burroughs 2003:133

Burroughs' characters operate at the edges of society, they are marginalised and, in many cases fugitives themselves. Their language is unstable and it is this instability that Burroughs uses as the basis for his developing mythology against stability.

This articulation of meaning also has resonance with an idea of meaning elucidated by Jean-Luc Nancy from Charles Rosen's frontiers of listening in *The Frontiers*

of Meaning: Three Informal Lectures on Music (Rosen 1994). In *Listening* Nancy writes:

To be listening is always to be on the edge of meaning, or in an edgy meaning of extremity, and as if the sound were precisely nothing else than this edge, this fringe, this margin – at least the sound that is musically listened to, that is gathered and scrutinized for itself, not, however, as an acoustic phenomenon (or not merely as one) but as a resonant meaning, a meaning whose *sense* is supposed to be found in resonance, and only in resonance.

Nancy (2007:7)

One challenge for the curator undertaking a strategy that follows this Burroughsian framework is that the contextualising of the art object becomes a risk of defining the limits of meaning. In the mode of perpetual transformation inherent in Burroughs' project, as I have defined it, there appears to be in conflict with such definition. It will become clear that my attempts to capture Burroughs' tape experiments face the paradox that, were I to be successful, they would lose their fugitive status, a status fundamental to their listening. A curatorial methodology drawn from the Burroughsian activities I have described risks destroying the object of their attention by making it the object of attention of their audience.

How this is resisted in Burroughsian terms is through a Burroughsian curatorial strategy being firstly a project bound up in its own experimental process (a project as self-help strategy against conditioned action), and secondly a project that acknowledges its return to time, like the cut-ups and the tapes, is to allow for the ongoing project by others.

Following Lydenberg and according to my analogy Burroughs is searching for insights into his condition, revealing distorted and repeated images of himself both as the mechanism by which he is imprisoned and that which may eventually guide his release. In the news broadcasts Burroughs takes what is a complex reality categorised into a simple 'fact' and reflects, or echoes, it back into a complex multiplicity of events. Likewise he echoes Burroughs, the experimenter, into the multiplicity, creating a multitude of voices, as variable as the emotive inflections of "hello yes hello" in 'Her Primrose Laundry', in the hope of revealing the exit or escape from the confinements of the control of word and image.

In *Wising Up the Marks*, Timothy S. Murphy (1997) quotes a review of Burroughs' fiction by Alfred Kazin:

Burroughs's fiction happenings are a wholly self-pleasing version of what D. H. Lawrence called the 'pure present.' Lawrence meant that the act of creation could renew the world. What Burroughs means by it is reverie, a world forever being reshuffled in the mind, a world that belongs to oneself like the contents of a dream.

Kazin in Murphy 1997:142

For Burroughs the stable social order is a control machine, and, much like the narrative of 'Her Primrose Laundry' it is actively involved in keeping the population in conditioned action. In Burroughs' terms, terms he has adapted from sources including Korzybski, Cubism, Hubbard and Gysin, the individual can reshuffle the world in which they are imprisoned into causality, using experimentalist techniques of the arbitrary manipulation of words and sounds to produce new associations and behaviours.

If the world belongs to oneself it is a world like a theatre or the egocentrism of childhood. In such a world meanings can be discussed as affordances, what use they are to the person at its centre within a given context; a world in which radio noise may carry voices and meaning constructed through one's own niche of interactions. As such Burroughs appears to experience the world as a theatre, full of cause and effect determined by the play's malevolent author. Understanding the world in this way appears to give him the tools to make some impact upon his condition, to manipulate the world in terms of the magical universe as he understands it.

Burroughs' experiments with tape are not attempts to develop or advance an artistic domain of practice but are activities proposed to remind of the conformity of our responses, our own cycles of conditioned action, and suggest ways to break out of this cycle through new associations.

Such insights propose interactions with a site of the exhibition as a theatre through which a visitor might capture and manipulate their environment in accordance with their needs. If a Burroughsian process of meaning-making is adapted into a curatorial strategy this implies an environment of resources for the visitor rather than a museological preservation of the artefact. It also suggests the exhibition form as a component in the meaning-making process rather than a didactic declaration of artistic meaning. Burroughs use of sound indiscriminately reshuffles fictional, ambient technological artefacts as a means of invoking a space of liberation. In the following, final, chapter I will now demonstrate how such relationships to sound and to meaning can be presented through curatorial strategy.

4 The Tape Experiments of William S. Burroughs at IMT Gallery

4.0 Introduction

In the Introduction to this thesis I described the importance of candid articulations of curatorial strategy in contemporary art. So far in this thesis I have presented, in Chapter One, a sound-oriented approach in contemporary art exhibitions. Following this I have presented Burroughs as a subject both for exhibition and for the development of a curatorial strategy.

This chapter presents the curatorial strategy of the thesis as a practical application. In this chapter I contextualise and describe the exhibition *Dead Fingers Talk: The Tape Experiments of William S. Burroughs* that took place at IMT Gallery, London between 28th May and 18th July 2010. I curated this exhibition as an implementation of my research. The theme and approach came out of my thesis and question marks in the curatorial process were resolved as directed by the conclusions drawn through Chapters One to Three.

The title of the exhibition, *Dead Fingers Talk*, was taken from the Burroughs novel of the same name (Burroughs 1963). The novel was in fact a collection of extracts from *Naked Lunch*, *The Soft Machine* and *The Ticket That Exploded*, published for a British readership, many of which would not have had access to the other works at that time. As such this title seemed appropriate in that it implied a further reshuffling of two of the cut-up novels for the purpose of introducing an audience to previously unseen material. Additionally the title evoked the on-going project element of Burroughs' activities: the dead still talking, and the link in Burroughs between voice and body as described at in Chapter Three: fingers doing the talking rather than just mouths.

In Chapter Two I described how collaboration and practical engagement were key parts of a Burroughsian strategy. Therefore the inclusion of this project within this thesis is to be read as an important, inferential part of my articulation of curatorial methodology in response to Burroughs. In essence this exhibition is proposed as a gallery-based curatorial proposition that, in Burroughs' terms, is about revealing the point at which Burroughsian Space might be negotiated.

The first section of this chapter reviews the principal concerns that arise from the curatorial strategy. Here I articulate how they were resolved in its application to the exhibition.

In the second section I contextualise the project by reviewing other recent exhibitions about Burroughs that took place immediately prior to *Dead Fingers Talk* and also just after it. My interrogation of these exhibitions is not as independent criticism of the approach taken by the curators of these projects, but reviews them in terms of how they might inform my own curatorial strategy.

From this I present my approach to *Dead Fingers Talk*, looking at the process of selection in the run up to the event, of how the exhibition was put together, and of its initial manifestation in the gallery. I then give my own analysis of how the project responds to the research presented in Chapters One to Three.

4.1 Basic Concerns in Establishing a Curatorial Strategy for the Exhibition

My intentions for the application of curatorial strategy are three-fold. Firstly it is directed at providing a valid and rigorous application of Burroughs' approach to sound. Secondly it is directed at demonstrating a valid response to my articulation of the domain of *audial art* as a curatorial conceit. Thirdly it is presented through the established methodology of the curator-as-practitioner.

In my original conception of the project there was immediate friction between a radical Burroughsian approach, and an approach that would help support my articulation of audial art. In Chapter Two I described how a strategy drawn from Burroughs' experimentalism would resist formal frameworks of meaning-making. The art gallery context could be described as the antithesis of a formal framework, in that, as I quoted in Chapter One "[Galleries] are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art" (Greenberg et al. 1996:2). Why the art gallery supports my articulation of audial art however is that it is primarily a framework for visual practice. The tools that visitors bring to the meaning-making process are configured for ocularcentric interaction and yet the diversity of contemporary arts practice has given general audiences notification that audible and tactile elements may also be major components of gallery-based propositions. As such this would make the art gallery context a suitable framework for the audial art proposition that attempts to avoid the more common technologies of the concert or performance arena.

Ultimately I decided to have the project take place in the gallery framework in order to be able to fully monitor all stages of the project, in order to ensure a good captive audience and in order to be able to give the artists involved greater freedom in

terms of the materials they would be able to use.¹ This is a recognised compromise in terms of the Burroughsian strategy and therefore interesting to note for future projects that do not require such a supportive context for audial art.

With this restriction I shall now summarise key points made in this thesis relevant to the curatorial strategy.

In Chapter One I presented an ecological framework for curatorial practice. I staged the curation as an environmental relationship with meaning-making that involves subjective interactions led by affordances.

In relation to this ecological engagement with environment, as articulated via Maturana and Clarke, I described technology as a tool that extends the available niche of interactions of the visitor, suggesting new or different affordances through which they might engage with meaning-making. I described how sound in arts exhibitions has the tendency to be organised around the tools associated with its core practice. From this I expressed the concern that thinking in terms of *sound art* or *sonic art* may contribute to this tendency. For this reason, and in accordance with the postmedia approach that I am taking, I suggested *audial art* to describe the emphases of my curatorial strategy and approach to sound. This approach, as addressed in Chapter One, is particularly important in terms of my articulation of sound both in terms of sound's interaction with the whole cognitive body and in terms of my analysis of hallucination and synaesthesia as implicit in cognitive interactions with sound.

In accordance with my articulation of the curator-as-practitioner the exhibition was organised with emphasis on engagement with the materials without overt emphasis on historical narrative or authenticity. As such, curatorial decisions were geared towards opening up the potential for individual approaches to the materials presented. Practical examples of this approach included the lack of any official sequence by which the works should be experienced and the avoidance of any gallery texts defining the meaning of a work or how a work should be read. As a substitute for the latter, a series of participatory talks and performances was scheduled to present different approaches to the material.²

The conscious attempt to make the audience aware that the interaction with meaning is their priority, not the priority of the artist or the priority of a narrative of

¹ Materials would not need to be weather proofed and/or theft resistant, for example, and, if necessary, would not need to come with their own electricity supply.

² The panels included David Burrows (from *Plastique Fantastique*), Anthony Joseph, Kit Poulson, David Toop and Salomé Voegelin, with performances by Ascsoms, Joel Cahen and Solina Hi-Fi

historicity, is the key concern of the approach I have articulated in this thesis in terms of its manifestation in a public context. Such an approach also adheres to the context of Burroughs' intentions as I have articulated them in regard to the cut-up and tape experiment process as an ongoing and collaborative interaction.

As both the focus of the exhibition and this thesis the experiments operate both as object and context. They are things to display and allegories of that display in terms of how they have informed the curatorial methodology.

Considering Burroughs' tape experiments as allegories of public engagements with audial art suggests an interesting relationship between the meaning-making process of exhibitions of art and the materials through which this process might be understood to be taking place. Although the project orbits sound-making properties and domains in which discourse on sound might be deemed relevant to discussion, the principles of an audial art project as articulated in the first chapter of this thesis advocated an expanded approach to sound in planning and delivering the exhibition.

From a curatorial perspective, approaching such material not as the relic of a past event but as an on-going cognitive engagement has the potential to align an experience-based relationship of the material to the meaning-making process. That is to say a practice-based ecological relationship to meaning, and one that prioritises experimental approaches.

In order to present how the exhibition complements this approach, I have examined, in the previous chapter, the work and ideas of Burroughs with particular emphasis on the period in which collaboration is a major component of his cultural production, the period from the compilation of *Naked Lunch* to his return to the United States. Obviously there exists important collaborative incidents and proposals outside of this timeframe;³ however this period, as described in the previous chapter, is the most dense in terms of theories and practices of collaboration.

From this research I demonstrated relationships between Burroughs' project and mythology and his experimental activities with tape, partly as self-examination, and partly as examination of the world, but both as resistance to confinement within a cycle of conditioned action. As I have articulated, Burroughs' experiments with tape are not attempts to advance an artistic domain of practice but are proposed as actions that, for Burroughs, are reminders of the conformity of our responses. In accordance with these

³ Early collaborations include the writing of the recently published *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks* (2008) in 1945 with Burroughs and Jack Kerouac taking turns writing chapters.

insights into Burroughs' project I sought to curate an exhibition that, likewise, would enforce arbitrary conditions as part of its practice, that is to say provoke incidents through which, in Burroughs' terms, my own cycle of conditioned action, as curator, might be disturbed.

Additionally I was to attempt to emphasise, within the curatorial strategy, the importance of collaboration and the challenge to artistic autonomy that I have discussed in the preceding chapter, and this chapter also details this process and the insights I gained from it.

4.2 Recent Exhibitions of Burroughs' Work

This section describes some exhibitions of Burroughs' work recent to the *Dead Fingers Talk* exhibition at IMT Gallery. I shall be presenting my insights into a small selection of such projects, concentrating on the major exhibitions. This will contextualise my own exhibition in terms of the background of curatorial engagement with Burroughs.

The exhibitions I shall discuss are *Cut-Ups, Cut-Ins, Cut-Outs: The Art of William S. Burroughs* at the Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna;⁴ *The Name is Burroughs: Expanded Media* at ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art, Karlsruhe;⁵ *The Third Mind*⁶ in the Palais de Tokyo, Paris,⁷ and a specific work by Damien Hirst, *I'll Be Right Back: Portrait of William Burroughs* (2004), in *Burroughs Live* at the Royal Academy, London.⁸ Despite two of these exhibitions following *Dead Fingers Talk* rather than preceding it, a brief analysis of how these exhibitions chose to represent Burroughs' practice will offer insights and alternative approaches to the subject and contextualise the exhibition in terms of Burroughs as an arts subject.⁹

I shall present a brief summary of relevant features of these projects as a context for *Dead Fingers Talk* in terms of insights on interesting aspects of curation in the context

⁴ 15th June – 21st October 2012, curated by Collin Fallows and Synne Genzmer

⁵ 24th March – 12th August 2012, curated by Udo Breger, Axel Heil and Peter Weibel

⁶ To retain clarity I shall hereafter refer to the Burroughs/Gysin concept as "The Third Mind" and the exhibition as *The Third Mind*.

⁷ 7th September 2007 – 8th January 2008, curated by Ugo Rondinone

⁸ 8th December 2008 – 9th January 2009, curated by José Ferez Kuri as part of *Collision Course* in the GSK Contemporary 2008 season

⁹ There are other exhibitions within this timeframe in which Burroughs has been an important part, including my own *Swarms of Black Flies Make the Roses Purple* at IMT Gallery and *Silencer* at Payne-Shurvell, London, however these, and others, are less relevant as contextual case studies than the major exhibitions I have mentioned above due either to the repetition of the works on show or the broader themes employed in each project.

I have articulated in Chapter One, whilst also considering Burroughsian factors as articulated in Chapters Two and Three.

4.2.1 Curating Burroughs: Fallows and Genzmer at Kunsthalle Wien

This section briefly considers one of the most recent major exhibitions of Burroughs' output at the time of writing: *Cut-ups, Cut-ins, Cut-outs*. Both this exhibition and the exhibition at ZKM, discussed in the following section, attempted a survey of Burroughs' production viewed as artistic proposition. *Cut-ups, Cut-ins, Cut-outs* is unequivocal in this by employing, as it does, the subtitle: *The Art of William S. Burroughs*.

Cut-ups, Cut-ins, Cut-outs included notebooks, photographs, cut-ups, tape experiments and film alongside the more traditional art propositions of paintings and drawings. It was a fertile and thorough exhibition, however such an amalgamation of Burroughs' production under the designation of "art" could, in terms of the not-art proposition, be problematic. This is particularly with regards to the tape experiments, which I have shown to not originally have been proposed as an artistic proposition. Such recontextualising however is indicative of the majority of exhibitions of Burroughs' production that take place within an art gallery context. My concern would be that recontextualising the tape experiments reframes them with entirely different aesthetic considerations. Although as materials they are indeed useful to art propositions (as they are to this thesis itself), and their reframing might be deemed consistent with Burroughs' strategy of challenging orthodoxy, their designation as "the art of William S. Burroughs" undoes some of this significance by their assuming a less complex relationship to the circumstances of their production.

This recontextualisation sets an important precedent for the experiments in *Dead Fingers Talk*. In order to respond to my view of the importance of the not-art proposition of the experiments I would make it clear not to use the term "art" either in my request for materials for the exhibitions as well as reference to the materials presented in the exhibition. In the first case this would allow the individuals involved in the project to conceive of propositions that they might not consider artworks. In the latter case this would keep the field open for interpretation of the experiments as non-art propositions regardless of their reframing in an arts context. The presence of the gallery itself, as well as the inclusion of a number of artists within the exhibition, would be enough to satisfy the audial art proposition.

4.2.2 Curating Burroughs: Breger, Heil and Weibel at ZKM

Both *Cut-Ups, Cut-Ins, Cut-Outs* and *The Name is Burroughs – Expanded Media* sought to present an expanded survey of Burroughs' practices. Whilst *Cut-Ups, Cut-Ins, Cut-Outs* focused on Burroughs own production, *The Name is Burroughs* additionally presented a vast number of artefacts by artists, musicians, curators and writers that in some way responded to Burroughs' project including works by unknown artists. The exhibition also contained a large number of displayed publications, many in multiple editions, photographs and other contextual material of Burroughs himself.

One aspect of the ZKM installation worth mentioning is a resistance to chronological presentation and the use of floor diagrams. Titled arrows placed at intervals guided the visitor through the exhibition in a manner that, rather than present the biographical narrative as a fixed linear progression, offered alternative options of accessing the material more in the manner of an Internet search engine. This sensitive piece of exhibition design granted the visitor the concession that there might be value found in a subjective approach to the material, that is to say an acknowledgement of the importance of an enfranchised visitor in relation to the exhibition's theme. As such *The Name is Burroughs* presented an exemplary compromise between a project seeking to contextualise Burroughs in a historical narrative, and the openness to engagement typified by the curator-as-practitioner, visitor-focused strategy I presented in Chapter One.

4.2.3 Curating Burroughs: Rondinone at the Palais de Tokyo

Taking place prior to both of the exhibitions mentioned above, *The Third Mind* (2007), presented a very different approach to curating Burroughs. Indeed it could be argued that *The Third Mind* did not curate Burroughs at all but was an entirely separate artist-led proposition. However this exhibition is perhaps the most direct proposition comparable to the model of curatorial practice as I have articulated it in Chapter One of this thesis. I shall also demonstrate how it represents the *on-going project* theme I have articulated in Chapter Two.

Not an exhibition of Burroughs per se, but rather a curated project based on a premise "in homage"¹⁰ to Burroughs and Gysin, *The Third Mind* was an opportunity in

¹⁰ Press Release: *The Third Mind: Carte Blanche to Ugo Rondinone*, (2007) Palais de Tokyo

which Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone was given “carte blanche”¹¹ to curate an exhibition of his choosing.

The title comes from “The Third Mind”, a concept developed by Burroughs and Gysin from a 1930s book *Think and Grow Rich* by prominent self-help writer Napoleon Hill (Hill 1937). “The Third Mind” is the psychic division of Hill’s “Master Mind”, an abstraction of mental processes that, according to both Hill and Burroughs, forms from shared activities. The publication of a book collaboration by Burroughs and Gysin titled *The Third Mind* (Burroughs 1978) is essentially a collection of writing and experiments relating to the cut-up technique. It articulated “The Third Mind” as an attempt to demonstrate the collaborative interaction of the two men at the point at which their practices overlap. Both the book *The Third Mind* and the concept of “The Third Mind” is described by Burroughs in the following way:

[This book] is not the history of a literary collaboration but rather the complete fusion in a praxis of two subjectivities, two subjectivities that metamorphose into a third; it is from this collusion that a new author emerges, an absent third person, invisible and beyond grasp, decoding the silence.

Burroughs 1978:18

The use of the word “silence” here is crucial as, earlier on in the book in an interview with Conrad Knickerbocker, Burroughs makes the following response to a question on silence:

INTERVIEWER: In *Nova Express* you indicate that silence is a desirable state.

BURROUGHS: The *most* desirable state.

Burroughs 1978: 2

Burroughs then clarifies this in the context of a project to achieve a “nonbody experience”, to “achieve as far as possible a complete awareness of surroundings”, to go “outward” and he also makes it apparent that it is “the Word” that is to be silenced to achieve this aim [Ibid.]. This “silence” could also be compared to Burroughsian Space in that it is an ideal state where words have no meaning: “literally unthinkable in verbal terms” (Burroughs in Odier 1970:6). “The Third Mind” is thus a product of collaboration similar to that which I have articulated through the collaborative image from *The Ticket That Exploded* as described in Chapter Two and the on-going project of both the cut-up technique and the tape experiments.

¹¹ Press Release: *The Third Mind: Carte Blanche to Ugo Rondinone*, (2007) Palais de Tokyo, “Carte blanc” here also refers to a series of exhibitions at the Palais de Tokyo in which artists are granted the freedom to conceive an exhibition.

Choosing the Burroughs/Gysin concept as the central conceit of the exhibition may potentially render Rondinone's curatorial process comparable to the curatorial strategy I articulated in this thesis for two reasons. Firstly, that the Burroughs/Gysin concept of "The Third Mind" is concerned with collaborative practices that come out of the preoccupations that Burroughs and Gysin had with such material as Hills' self-help book and Hubbard's Dianetics. Secondly, the choice of Burroughs and Gysin presupposes the likelihood of an awareness of the cut-up and thus rearrangement as an activity of organisation, due to the cut-up being the most apparent common factor between the two.

In the first case the theme's similarities with the propositions I have described may offer some congruence *if* the curatorial process observes, as it appeared to have done so, efforts to maintain Burroughs's proposal of the DIY ethic presented in the previous chapter, rather than a purely historical contextualisation of the materials.

In the second case if the cut-up process, as detailed in Chapter Two, was developed in any degree as an activity or ethos of the curator, then it may also present a project that *exhibits curating*. By this I mean a demonstration of curating-as-practice presented as a component of the exhibition's organisation, what O'Neill identifies in *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* as "the exhibition form as [...] artwork" (O'Neill 2012:110). In accordance with my articulation of curating-as-practice in Chapter One such activity helps to liberate the audience from a presumption of formal historicity and encourage them to investigate the project as a domain for engagements with meaning-making.

The premise of the "carte blanche" series, and the appointment of Rondinone as curator in his capacity as an artist, suggests congruence with the curatorial emphasis placed in Chapter One. In Rondinone's case his work does not confine itself to a particular media (whether installation-based, sculptural, 2-dimensional and/or audiovisual) and his exhibitions "resemble group shows with works by several artists [that explore] the creative possibilities that the gap between a search for meaning and its attainment can generate" (Tarsia 2005:273-274). As such Rondinone represents an individual who could be regarded as a convincing example of a postmedia approach (as articulated in Chapter One), both through his reluctance to adhere to a discourse within specified media, and in his apparent disregard for a cohesive style as identified by Tarsia. The "gap between a search for meaning and its attainment" also suggests potential domains of interaction as presented in the previous chapters of this thesis.

The exhibition itself provides a cross-temporal investigation into practices that appear to relate to Burroughs and Gysin, although not always the central thesis of “the Third Mind” as a discourse of meaning through collaboration. There are points at which it is the interface between works that are evidently intended to be the “silence” that is “decoded,”¹² particularly effective at points in the exhibition where one work is impossible to consider without the presence of another. It is worth noting here that the “decoding the silence” proposition of “The Third Mind” is comparable to Tarsia’s suggestions of Rondinone’s practice as an exploration of “the creative possibilities that the gap between a search for meaning and its attainment can generate” if one were to analogise “silence” in Burroughs with a state in which there has been dissolution of meaning-as-Word.

A final component of the exhibition that it is important to consider is how it deals with the premise at the centre of the original *The Third Mind* publication. Although there exist works of collaboration within the exhibition,¹³ there are occasions where collaboration is explicitly curated by Rondinone. This is particularly relevant to my curatorial strategy in that the collaboration occurs in the exhibition space through Rondinone’s placement, not in the artists’ studios. Perhaps the most striking or significant demonstration in this case was in the placement of Martin Boyce’s neon web in the same room as some of Valentin Carron’s crucifixes and Jay DeFeo’s paintings, with Boyce’s web covering the visitors as they navigate the space:



Photo: Marc Damage

¹² See Burroughs 1978

¹³ Including collage collaborations between Burroughs and Gysin

As an accumulation of materials by the curator, the collaboration then also occurs in the spaces as the visitors discover them. This demonstrates an example of curator-as-practitioner by replaying the works by the artists into a new context in which they are inextricably bound to other materials. Such a collage of elements is comparable to Burroughs' project that doesn't seek to purify elements in the cognition of phenomena but shuffle material into new permutations.

Following the premise of "The Third Mind" that, according to Burroughs and Gysin, "decodes the silence" between collaborators, the exhibition *The Third Mind* suggests, as a title, a proposition whose aim is to present an exhibition of a decoding of the silence between words/collaborators/works. The interplay between the works in the Boyce, Carron and DeFeo room is not just a function of the works themselves. They also demonstrate curation as the spectacle: the presentation of interaction and investigation as a live domain of the exchange of meaning, not an engagement with a defined narrative or historicity. What are being highlighted are the connections, which could in many ways describe the curator as an engineer of relations.

4.2.4 Hirst and Lucas as Examples of Engagement with the Burroughs Myth

Like *The Third Mind*, Damien Hirst's *I'll Be Right Back: Portrait of William Burroughs* (2004) in *Burroughs Live* appeared to represent an artist-as-curator proposition on the subject of Burroughs. I first came across this work in the exhibition *Burroughs Live* curated by F Pérez Kuri as part of the Royal Academy's GSK Contemporary exhibition. Under F Pérez Kuri's curation the Burroughs components of the project were kept separate from the remainder of a bigger exhibition of other artists' works. Like *The Name is Burroughs* at ZKM, Burroughs' books were presented behind glass as components of a history. Films by Burroughs were also shown, although these were kept separate from his drawings and texts by being exhibited in a purpose-built cinema space. Although the project amply demonstrated the breath of Burroughs' activities, it did so in a manner that lent his activities a degree of order in the separation of media that runs contrary to the audial art domain of my project's curatorial methodology.

Like the cinema space, Hirst's work within this exhibition was, in common with much of his sculptural works, a cabinet of its own. In order to give an example of the different ways that works within exhibitions react to the Burroughs context I shall

contrast Hirst's *I'll Be Right Back* with a work by a British contemporary of Hirst that appeared in *The Third Mind* at Palais de Tokyo: Sarah Lucas' *Car Park* (2007).

Hirst's work has been understood as a repackaging of abject reality for a gallery audience. According to Matthew Collings, they encapsulated a minimalist aesthetic popular in the late '80s (Collings 1997:13), and could therefore be considered as an artist who takes the white cube, or the gallery vitrine, and fills it with bodies, refuse and chemicals; the stuff of decay and mortality. Likewise his work in *Burroughs Live* appears to be a presentation of the mortality of Burroughs himself: old bullets, sunglasses and arranged photographs. These items in contradiction of the title of the exhibition resonate more with Burroughs' as an individual who is dead. This could of course be a wry take on the two meanings of the homograph "Live" in the title of the exhibition,¹⁴ as if the title was the command of a B movie Dr. Frankenstein figure, and that Burroughs is somehow revived by the presence of his objects. However the frank presentation of the works, and their component parts, has a more prosaic result: that of an authentication-through-material of the importance of Burroughs, concomitant with a deification of his paraphernalia and waste.¹⁵



Damien Hirst *I'll Be Right Back: Portrait of William Burroughs* (2004)

Hirst's piece, like works by other artists in the exhibition, such as David Hockney and Francesco Clemente, is referred to as a "portrait", and as such this approach appears to define the curatorial emphasis: a presentation or representation of Burroughs the icon, alongside the practices and ideas with which he is associated.

¹⁴ The title of the exhibition was drawn from *Burroughs Live: The Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs* (2000).

¹⁵ Although not on show in the exhibition this is perhaps this is most explicit in the film *Words of Advice: William S. Burroughs on the Road* (2007) in which Burroughs' friend and plumber, proudly displays a piece of the late Burroughs' faces preserved in resin that he rescued from a blocked pipe.

Like Hirst's *I'll Be Right Back*, incidentally the last thing Burroughs is reported to have said before his death in 1997, there did appear to be, in terms of Lucas' *Car Park*, a reference to a contextual history of Burroughs-as-icon. Those familiar with the biography of Burroughs and Gysin, particularly of the time that Burroughs spent in the United Kingdom, might easily link Lucas' *Car Park*, a car with smashed out windows, to the infamous J. G. Ballard exhibition *Crashed Cars* at the New Arts Lab/Institute for Research in Art and Technology in 1970.¹⁶ *Jim Ballard: Crashed Cars*, followed, and helped to publicise, Ballard's recent collection of stories *The Atrocity Exhibition* (Ballard 1970), for which Burroughs had written the preface. Indeed *Crashed Cars* could be seen as the realisation of a fictional exhibition presented in *The Atrocity Exhibition*.



Sarah Lucas *Car Park* (1997) as installed in *The Third Mind*

Photo: Marc Damage

The inclusion of Lucas' *Car Park* however presents a quintessentially Burroughsian historicity. Including a potential reference point to the known history of the Burroughs' life such inclusion might appear to be a proposition more associated with the astute curator of a museum. However by including *Car Park*, and indeed what that work might be seen to represent, Rondinone's curation perverts this methodology into a very Burroughsian example of curation-as-practice. Firstly the Ballard exhibition with which I am associating *Car Park* is the realisation of a previously fictional exhibition, which has an interesting resonance with the slippage between fact and fiction discussed in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis.

¹⁶ 4th to 28th April 1970 at 1 Rupert Street

Secondly this is not the car of Ballard, this is the car of Lucas, for whilst she is known for taking objects and presenting them as explicit cultural signification, the jump from one to the other is not made clear. Lucas' work does demonstrate interesting parallels with Burroughs' own project. For Amna Malik, Lucas' works are there to present sex and sexuality as an ruse and point out its absurdity (Malik 2009:91) through "a conjunction of crude associations" (Malik 2009:2) and she also points out that Lucas' innuendos make use of a vernacular culture, and that "the vernacular is created in opposition and as a resistance to official culture" (Malik 2009:5). Whilst Hirst's response to Burroughs is to enclose artefacts in a traditional form of the glass museum case, the context for Lucas inclusion in *The Third Mind* is less submissive to conventional form. The macabre, reductive and deliberately offensive nature of the vernacular from which Lucas' analogies emerge, particularly when faced with some of the actual works, rather than reproductions, involve degrees of smell or putrefaction. Additionally, Lucas is known for work that presents the grotesque of cross-gender stereotypes: presenting a kebab as a vulva (*Two Fried Eggs and a Kebab* (1992)) or a bucket as a vagina (*Au Naturel* (1994)); melons (*Au Naturel* (1994), *Bitch* (1995) or *Nude #2* (1999)) or fried eggs as breasts (*Two Fried Eggs and a Kebab* (1992) or *Self-Portrait with Fried Eggs* (1996)); a cucumber or can of beer as a penis (*Au Naturel* (1994) and the multiple *Beer Can Penis* (1993-2004) respectively), and her appropriation and magnification of the more lurid aspects of British tabloid journalism (such as the *Seven Up*; *Fat, Forty and Flabulous*; *Sod You Gits* or *We Score Every Night* (all from 1990-2), black and white prints of *The Sport* or *The Sunday Sport* blown up to 61 by 81 cm). As it is, Lucas is dealing with a vernacular that, like Burroughs' Jive Talk, is in flux, a fugitive glossary that originally comes into being as "resistance to official culture" (Malik 2009:5).

In the specific case of the work exhibited in *The Third Mind*, *Car Park* is a work immediately indicative of this resistance. Aside from the puns for which Lucas is known, *Car Park* still presents a similar field of play, albeit one less bound by language. As Dziewior suggests, "'Car Park' demonstrates [Lucas'] interest in a wide range of social problems, such [...] the social causes of vandalism." (Dziewior, in Grosenick/Reimschneider, 1999:326) and is, in essence, a display of a confrontation between social and anti-social elements. This is particularly evident from the title of the work, "park" also being descriptive of recreation ground and therefore a location designated for play and amusement. As such *Car Park* becomes a display of the field of performance in which Lucas' usual vernacular might play out, representing the conflict

between society and the anti-social by wryly reshuffling society's designation of recreation through the word "park". Read in this way *Car Park* is similar to the Burroughs' project as described as interplay between society and the outsider, offered as theatre.

Although unlikely to be directly connected by a casual visitor to Ballard's *Crashed Cars*, Lucas' *Car Park* does offer similar domains of interpretation, particularly when placed in the context of a late '60s early '70s countercultural milieu as it is through its incorporation under the theme of the exhibition.

Lucas' inclusion in *The Third Mind* (2007) is, if it is read in part in the way I have done, a potential reference point to a history of engagements through fiction, the interplay between fiction and its playing out in reality, and a sign of the potential manifestation of these fictions in artistic production. At the same time it is about the very real interactions between a perceived social and antisocial divide, a divide that, crucially for the Burroughsian project as previously articulated, remains contemporarily relevant and active.

Taken as examples of approaches to methodologies of curating Burroughs, the example of Hirst can be read as a ceremonial endeavour, representing Burroughs via artefacts and associations, particularly ones related to popular associations with his life. It does not represent the perpetuation of his project as much as provide an, albeit fascinating, display of paraphernalia with which he is associated. By contrast, Lucas' *Car Park* rests more upon the themes crucial to Burroughs' project.

I have, in review of exhibitions and works presented a background to the kind of considerations at play in curating a project in accordance with my curatorial strategy. The following sections deal specifically with *Dead Fingers Talk: The Tape Experiments of William S. Burroughs*.

3.3 Dead Fingers Talk

Although interesting from a critically reflective perspective, a museological approach to Burroughs' activities with sound would not have been intuitive in terms of my curatorial strategy. Instead I undertook an inferential curation in relation to the nature of the experiments themselves; that is to say the intention of the experiments as an activity to take forward. This approach is as much connected the my articulation of the curator-as-

practitioner in Chapter One, as it is my analysis of Burroughsian Time-Binding and its resistance in the form of a Burroughsian approach to meaning-making in Chapter Two.

It might be argued that this is a presentation of Burroughs in his terms, but beyond the outcomes he was capable of determining. Therefore it is crucial to consider the individual responses to the project (the works submitted by the individuals involved) not only in terms of how they respond to Burroughs' project, as articulated in Chapters Two and Three, but also in terms of how they respond to my articulation of sound and audial art as articulated in Chapter One.

In terms of a strategy of contemporary engagement, defined in the first chapter and then contextualised with regards to Burroughs as a paradigm of perpetual revolution, there is a major external factor that favours this approach: the exhibition location in a contemporary art gallery, which, by definition, favours engagement through being the forum for the presentation of that which is contemporary.

In the project's presentation in a contemporary art gallery, it should be noted that the gallery in question (IMT Gallery in London) was not, at that time, a commercially driven organisation. When the project was presented, the gallery, which still is a non-profit organisation, was supported by public funding and private sponsorship, not through sales of work. This is important to mention as otherwise it would be necessary to include in terms of the exhibition how the curatorial activity is influenced by the commercial requirements of the gallery. Additionally it might be necessary to include the political ramifications of support, were it not that the project itself was funded (due in part to the nature of the project)¹⁷ almost entirely by me, with some support from IMT Gallery, ADI Audiovisual and London College of Communication. In the case of the support of these organisations, their requirements for support did not interfere with the priorities of the exhibition as all supporters were aware of this necessity as a condition of the project, and/or had interests that were served by association with the free rein nature of curatorial activity and/or its association with Burroughs.

The major internal factor that makes my curatorial approach previously articulated particularly relevant in this instance is the contemporising request of Burroughs that his material and ideas in relation to sound be part of a DIY activity in

¹⁷ In order that the project had a suitably large number of works on show and that these works were (for the most part) made specifically for the exhibition the involvement of participant would have required a significant investment in terms of artists' fees and therefore a funding bid beyond the scope of the project's time frame. Additionally I was concerned that potential requirements for funding, no matter how slight, may have a restricting influence on the experimental nature of the project. Therefore the decision for the project to be self-funded was made early on, and all of the participants kindly donated their time for free.

present time. As in the interplay between works in Rondinone's *The Third Mind* (2007), an exhibition that follows a Burroughsian ideal of creative production can endeavour to retain a contemporaneous activity of juxtaposition without becoming uncharacteristic of Burroughs and his work.

An exhibition thus articulated can indeed push this point of contemporaneous engagement further. It may endeavour to present the cut-up as a visitor-focused engagement at the site of artistic exchange, not just an activity of the curator and/or artist. This challenge to curatorial control and to authenticity, in terms of a presumption of artistic authenticity, is a crucial aspect of the Burroughsification of curatorial activity. If, for Burroughs, the goal of art is magical in origin, the material around which activities were formed becomes directly, and hierarchically, associated with the result: the happening or exchange.

Additionally Burroughs' methods for gathering the materials were tied up with aleatory practices: the firing of shot at paint, the cutting through of print, the recording of noise and use of random edit points. Although the curator remains as an instigator of activity and a potential figure of orientation, the material itself doesn't need academic fixity but can retain a looseness in terms of its selection, organisation and categorisation. This looseness can on one hand be compared to the Raudive tapes in terms of being pseudo-scientific materials for investigation, or on the other to the Deutsch experiments as being data for active research.¹⁸ As such the aleatory should be represented at important moments of organisation in terms of the exhibition project.

4.3.1 Artists and Autonomy

As described earlier in this chapter, one of the points at which the exhibition *The Third Mind* (2007), appears to most accurately convey a sense of the Burroughs/Gysin project as a present time proposition (that is to say an on-going investigation of an active audience), are the points at which it becomes impossible to separate works from each other in their consideration. The ecological impact of this blending of artworks, and thus the destabilising of any assumed autonomy of the artist, is one that reacts in interesting ways to audial art as articulated in the first chapter. Audial art is a domain of art practices bound up with the conceptions and reference point of sound that I have presented in

¹⁸ See Chapter One.

Chapter One. As a factor of this, audial art represents the fugitive boundaries of works, identities, purpose and meaning that suggest a complementary curatorial strategy.¹⁹

Some of the interesting ways in which audial art responds to an indefinite author is in the domain's mutable and inconsistent characteristics, and its multidisciplinary organisation. It could be argued that such a group of practices might require more formal purification in order that it be properly understood, however such purification would be inconsistent with the reasoning of its existence. An articulation of the author might be deemed problematic not only in contemporary practices (which deal, for example, with such authorial slippages as sampling and DJ-ing, the conceptual artist as a director of ideas and/or craftsmen, and the sound artist as a component of a larger team of cultural production) but also in, albeit less blurred, authorial complexities in, for example, the histories of music, storytelling and ballet from composer to musician, performer, writer and actor. In each case the active author of the exchange, in terms of an exchange of meaning, is unclear, and as such responds more to an active, affordance-based interaction with meaning-making than a prescribed one.

When considered in terms of the expanded nature of hearing and engagement that audial art suggests, as articulated in Chapter One, an acknowledgement of the blurring or authorship is a vital component of the enfranchised visitor. Whilst one visitor might deem a piece of music to be the core of meaningful exchange, and thus imagine a composer as the author of the work, another might be interacting in a domain transcribed by his or her niche that favours the interpretive movements of the dancer, or the orchestra, or the conductor, or the architect who designs the space. As such the author is caught up as a character in the investigation of meaning and is subject to the same fluctuations and inconsistencies as the material itself.

In order to incorporate the implications of this condition in the curatorial organisation of the exhibition project, the following approaches were used:

1. The artists approached for the project were drawn from a broad range of disciplines including novelists, poets, curators, musicians, filmmakers, installation artists, new media artists, academics and composers. Additionally I ensured that some of those approached were collaborators or groups, thereby ensuring an indistinct authorship within individual works: *Plastique*

¹⁹ It is perhaps revealing of the traditions of arts criticism that one of the exhibition's (albeit positive) reviewers asked that each of the works in *Dead Fingers Talk* be played separately, allowing her to engage with meaning in each specific recording rather than contemplate the interactions and interruptions they made to each other.

Fantastique, Negativland, Thomson & Craighead, Ultra-red, The Human Separation, Alma/Joe Ambrose, Alex Baker & Kit Poulson and William Burroughs & Ian Sommerville.

2. The works as supplied were exhibited without reservation: that is if an artist proposed a work or works then they were accepted and exhibited. Relinquishing such an important aspect of curatorial control was undertaken to replicate aleatory procedure and thereby avoid conditioned action.
3. The works were displayed in such a way as to include moments when the content of individual works might be easily misread as belonging to different works. The requirements of the gallery entailed that sufficient information was available to refer potential visitors to specific works, however some roughness was given to allow the more casual visitor a greater degree of freedom. One of the most clear examples is that of a silent video work by Laureana Toledo (*Thoughts*) that I displayed next to headphones on which a sound-only work by Jörg Piringer (*Sorted Speech 1*) was being transmitted. Additionally no effort was made to split the works into discrete sensorial chambers unless stipulated in their proposal (Aki Onda's *First Thought Best Thought*) or through practical reasons such as the availability of sufficient equipment.

Thus the curatorial strategy is applied in terms of the material with which it is concerned and the means by which that material is gathered.

As Burroughs' intentions for his theories and practices around the tape experiments ask for a DIY approach, and the nature of the curatorial strategy and the location of the exhibition ask for contemporary practices, so the decision was made early on that the exhibition include work by contemporary artists that, in some way respond to the premise of Burroughs' experiments. This decision not only ensures that the project is in keeping with the contemporary engagement criteria of the curatorial strategy but also helps to balance any risk of uncriticality through close adherence to Burroughs' wishes. Whilst it supports how Burroughs intended his project to be engaged with, it also gives the opportunity for that project to be critiqued by a variety of contemporary practitioners.

4.3.2 The “Recording”

Participants in the exhibition were asked for a submission to represent his, her or their involvement. This submission was phrased simply as a “recording” for exhibition in accordance with the exhibition’s relevance to Burroughs’ tape experiments. As the word “recording” comes with a certain amount of baggage I shall briefly present some of that baggage here to give a background to the decisions of the participants.

Recording as a function of technology is not necessarily the first interaction that an artist has in the production of work, but one of the most evident in terms of the 20th Century expansion of possibilities in sound. Due to factors that include ease of access and supply, commodification of art works, increasing access to technologies (economically and otherwise), and ease of archiving, sound as a material in an art form of reproduction has become hugely prolific. The legacy of mix-tapes and recordable CDs has no doubt contributed to sound recording software becoming a routine inclusion on personal computers from point of purchase.

Attali’s ear of repeating (Attali 1985) and, for example, Goodwin’s concept of musical stasis (Goodwin 1988) offer specific takes on the effects of reproduction and of reproduction as resource compatible with sound in the arts. The ubiquity of reproduction, as a component of audial production with the aid of technology, is suggestive of our changing relationship to sound. In music, as identified by Attali (1985:89), sound recordings have become the primary experience, with live concerts (particularly those in which the performers mime to a recording) becoming its reproduction. The popular focus of behaviour as part of this engagement with the meaning-making process, including the simultaneous use of mobile phones to record live performances one is present at, is tied up in this privileging of the recording. Therefore the recording is a commonly understood and popularly authentic mode of engaging with sound, although, as I have covered earlier, sound’s trajectory from source to the cognitive niche of the listener is far from clear of obstacles.

The request that the artists involved submit a “recording” does not conflict with the postmedia definition of technology presented in the first chapter in that it does not stipulate the technological nature of that recording. This therefore allows for, and in fact makes explicit, an expanded definition of “recording” that would allow a recording to be understood as a proposition free of a defined technology. At the same time this specificity of a domain in which the work provided by the artists would operate, would

be one that is appropriate for a response to Burroughsian activities during the time period with which this thesis is concerned, a time period in which Burroughs' obsession with recordings and the pre-recorded was at its height (see Chapter Three).

4.3.3 A Note Regarding Participants

I have shown that engagement with sound as presented in the context of this thesis has been shown to have highly subjective properties. As articulated, audial art follows domains of engagement with phenomena that do not comply with traditional disciplines. Therefore identifying what does or does not constitute an artist involved in creative enquiry in audial art cannot be universally determined. Thus an ecological process of determination of such individuals is required. For example: responding to a selection process that does not follow a structural criterion but incorporates within its mechanism practice-based, esoteric or arbitrary elements.

Many of the participants to which I wrote asking for participation in the project came from a mixture of research into themes, practices and biographies that in some way seemed appropriate for Burroughs (Eduardo Navas' use of cut-up techniques for example, or Jo Ambrose's organisation of events for or about Burroughs) and some were selected on a casual basis. Some artists, such as Laureana Toledo and Riccardo Iacono were identified by subjective or arbitrary associations.

Claire Bishop in her essay 'Digital Divide: Contemporary Art and New Media' might contextualise the latter approach as one of significant cultural relevance to post-Internet activity:

[As Tacita Dean] details in the catalogue for [her] 2005 show at London's Camden Arts Centre, works by Lothar Baumgarten, Paul Nash, and Gerhard Richter (among others) were selected on the basis of chance, anecdote, and coincidence. From a twentieth-century perspective, this is the logic of the *dérive*. From a twenty-first-century perspective, it is the act of surfing: the pursuit of impromptu, subjective connections via the aleatory free association of navigating the Web. In the 1960s, this kind of drift was understood as an exodus from the logic imposed by postwar city planning; today, the *dérive* is the logic of our dominant social field, the Internet.

Bishop 2012

In many ways Burroughs could be said to prefigure such an organisation of media by extreme example. By undermining the centrality of the artist to the work and replacing the visitor with an active participant, both through collaboration and proposing ongoing production, he is announcing the digital age as described by Bishop and how she views the way we experience the world.²⁰

4.3.4 The Recordings

In order to adhere to the sensorial ambiguity of audial phenomena and to retain a postmedia approach to thematic relationships, any proposition of content may need to reflect a multiplicity of approaches to sound as a phenomena. As example such a content-sensitive theme could emphasise a phenomenon or trope that might be associated with audial activity yet not necessarily require sound as a result of its production. Such a theme would allow interaction with the above categorisation of audial artists, and with a potential audience, that is not only restricted to the personal relationship to sound held by the curator.

Participants were invited to take part in *Dead Fingers Talk: The Tape Experiments of William S. Burroughs* at IMT gallery in Bethnal Green. As already implied it was not an open invitation but a pre-defined selection procedure. This was intended so as to select individuals from different domains of audial activity, from different geographical locations and at different stages of their careers, yet all involved in radical practices that relate to differing concerns in terms of interaction with sound and its related technologies. By inviting a broad range of participants I would be able to have the best chances of demonstrating moments of congruity and incongruity of my cohesion to the curatorial strategy. Additionally participants were selected in terms of the designated field of audial art: to acknowledge a sound-oriented domain of interaction, and yet to simultaneously acknowledge a postmedia approach and one that might avoid the purification (sensorial or otherwise) implicit in some conceptions of sound arts.

Below is a summary of each of the participants and their submitted recordings. I have neither gone into an extensive review of the individual recordings nor provide detailed biographies of the participants other than to highlight some aspects of their

²⁰ As such, in the postmedia environment I have described in the opening chapter, the visitor-focused organisation of technology can be analogised as a user-orientation of contemporary cultural engagement via the Internet. The curator is the programmer, the service provider, who constructs the framework and the organisation of the site of exchange.

recording or biography that might be immediately relevant to this thesis. Instead I will (after providing this summary) concentrate more on relations between recordings as manifest in both the curatorial process and the final exhibition. I will do so in terms of and how this relates to the curatorial strategy as articulated in the preceding chapters of this thesis. In this way my analysis of the exhibition (and indeed the curation) follows the emphasis on collaboration and ecological meaning-making.

The participants are listed alphabetically:

Steve Aylett, *aylettBURROUGHStrack* (2010), audio

Aylett is a British satirical science fiction author whose works, like Burroughs, employ grotesque parodies of authority and power, and seemingly arbitrary jumps in the internal consistency of his writing. Aylett also experiences synaesthesia, a condition with relevance to this thesis' definition of audial art.

aylettBURROUGHStrack is a 4m40s digital stereo recording. It begins with churning electronic noise and heavily filtered vocal samples. Other background noises include wind and rain effects, interference, what may be a chainsaw or similar-sounding engine and unidentifiable rhythmic beats. The recording is heavily manipulated and the sounds, which you may at first sound biological, environmental or electronic, become frequently indistinguishable from each other. The recording also includes occasional vocal samples the clearest of which, "What do you think you're talking about? You let all the monsters loose when the chief was gone!", reveals some samples have been taken from the 1969 Godzilla film *Destroy All Monsters* AKA *Charge of the Monsters*.

Alex Baker and Kit Poulson, *Conversation* (2010), installation

British collaborative artists who work in a variety of media, making installations and performances "that explore the edges of sound, text, objects and movement."²¹

Conversation consisted of two black buckets containing an unspecified opaque black fluid (water-based ink). The buckets would occasionally emit a complex variety of sounds from deep within them, creating ripples and other geometrical patterns on the surface of the liquid. The sounds themselves were occasional deep, resounding plopping sounds, drips and occasional prolonged synthesised vibrations and swells.

²¹ From their artists' statement

Alma/Joe Ambrose, *He Also Took That Boat* (2010), audio

Joe Ambrose is an Irish writer, musician and filmmaker who has organised a number of projects surrounding William Burroughs. Alma is a Portuguese music duo with which Ambrose began collaborating for this recording.

He Also Took That Boat is a 4m24s dubstep musical composition featuring the voice of the poet Ira Cohen discussing making a trip to Tangiers and mentioning Paul Bowles, William Burroughs and Brion Gysin “who had, er, what would be very primitive tape recording equipment”.

Lawrence English, *In Absentia* (2010), installation

English is an Australian sound artist and curator and manages the Room40 record label.

In Absentia is a series of four audiocassette loops each running in a wall-mounted shoebox tape recorder. Each cassette contains only silences edited from Burroughs’ voice recordings.

The Human Separation, *Classic Verbatim* (2010), installation

A kinetic, musical collaboration between sound artist Stephen Cornford (UK) and multimedia artist and designer Matthew Appleby (UK). The Human Separation, using adapted domestic machines (such as desk fans, fire bells, boiler fans, wiper motors, a sewing machine and a massage bed) to activate or play instruments electric guitars and drums.

Classic Verbatim consisted of a record player, headphones (with headphone amplifier) and a stack of compact discs. The compact discs had been written using a modified process so that they could be played using a conventional turntable stylus. Each disc contained an extract of Burroughs reading from his texts.

Riccardo Iacono, *SKZCP* (2000), video, and *Letters* (2000), video

Iacono is a British artist working in multiple media.

Both *Letters* and *SKZCP* are silent, abstract videos containing quick edits of colourful abstract shapes looped in a relatively short sequence.

SKZCP is a 2m18s video made using photographically manipulated images painted and scratched directly on to the surface of 16mm film.

Letters is a 2m30s video made using a combination of hand-painted film and live photography. In making *Letters* Iacono acknowledges that he drew upon a number of influences including Burroughs' cut-up technique.

Anthony Joseph, *Hideous Corpus Madre* (2009), audio; *Barrel* (2009), audio; *Folkways* (2009), audio, and *Detritus* (2009), audio

Joseph is a British/Trinidadian poet, novelist and musician with Anthony Joseph and the Spasm Band.

The four recordings Joseph submitted are voice recordings of poems from his 2009 book of poetry, *Bird Head Son*. The short poems (all between 1m and 1m30s in length) explore Joseph's memories of his life in Trinidad in the 1970s and '80s.

Cathy Lane, *In Combat With...* (2010), video

Lane is a sound artist interested in histories and memories.

In Combat With... is an experimental recording of a friend of Lane's who she considers to have a broken stream-of-conscious way of communicating that struck Lane as a natural cut-up. Her recording has been edited and layered into the final work.

Eduardo Navas, *[Re]Cuts* (2010), video

Navas is an American curator who specialises in editing and sampling technologies as artistic production.

[Re]Cuts is a rhythmic video work remixing images and sounds from Navas' travels with superimposed text. Inspired by Burroughs' aesthetics and cut-up technique, "the video does not follow the strict cut-up rules professed by Burroughs, but rather considers his aesthetics as a point of reference to develop a non-sensical narrative."

Navas (artist's website: navasse.net)

Negativland, *Over the Hiccups* (2006), video, and *Favorite Things* (2006), video

Negativland is an American experimental plunderphonics band.

Over the Hiccups is a stop-motion animation (the visual component of the animation is by Tim Maloney) and uses a 1987 track from the Negativland album *Escape from Noise* of a child singing Arlen and Harburg's 'Over the Rainbow' through a bout of

hiccups. The track is played as if sung by an anthropomorphic rabbit on a tiny moon in space and ends with the rabbit hanging herself.

Favorite Things is a humorous re-edit of the song from *The Sound of Music* (1965), cutting through the various “favorite things” about which Maria von Trapp is singing to create a bizarre assortment with surreal and racial overtones: “lashes that sting on colored girls tied up with blue satin sashes, wild brown girls tied up in warm strings, wild, wild white girls that melt into nose cream...”

o.blaat, *Broadway Dreams* (2010), video

o.blaat is Japanese/American sound artist Keiko Uenishi.

Broadway Dreams is a 1m41s video loop of 16 individual videos arranged in a 4 by 4 grid. The individual videos are each random video cut-ups of material filmed on shopping trips in New York.

Aki Onda, *First Thought Best Thought* (2010), installation

Onda is a New York-based electronic musician, composer and artist. He is known for works with taped field recordings that he uses in live compositions.

First Thought Best Thought is a small room, painted black and separated from the exhibition by a curtain at the entrance. The room contains an old tape machine and speakers provided by Onda. The speakers emit sounds and there appears to be a tape playing in the machine, but closer inspection reveals the sounds to be coming from elsewhere (there is a CD on which Onda’s tapes have been recorded). The installation plays a collage of recordings from Morocco: coughs, Arabic music, children’s voices, the bleating of sheep, brief periods of silence, birds tweeting en masse, concussive activity on the recording equipment, conversation, a shriek somewhere between bird and mechanical brake, car horns, the wind against the microphone... There is no consistency in terms of the duration of individual parts.

Jörg Piringer, *Sorted Speech 1* (2009), audio

Piringer is an Austrian artist, musician, sound poet, and member of the Institute for Transacoustic Research and the Vegetable Orchestra, an orchestra that performs on instruments made from fresh vegetables.

Sorted Speech 1 is an experiment in extracting all the words from a found video of a speech by Barack Obama and replaying them alphabetically. It is a stereo recording 9m35s in length.

Plastique Fantastique, *Plastique Fantastique Yage-Cat-Demon-Shrine* (2010), installation

Plastique Fantastique are a performance group with a changeable membership envisaged as a group of human and inhuman avatars delivering communiqués from the extreme past and the future. It was originated by the only constant members artist David Burrows (UK) and academic Simon O’Sullivan (UK). Works often appear as comics, performances, texts, assemblages and installations.

Plastique Fantastique Yage-Cat-Demon-Shrine was a hanging mobile made to look like a cone with sections that supported small hand-made creatures, candles and glitter. The installation had an audio component that consisted of lo-fi echoing electronic and atmospheric sounds some of which were manipulated vocal noises of cats.

Giorgio Sadotti, *I Am* (2010), audio

Sadotti is a British conceptual artist.

I Am is a short (40 second) recording of a voice reading: “I. I am. I am being. I am being in. I am being in language. I am being in. I am being. I am. I.” The voice is bright but hampered by an unknown object(s) inserted in the speaker’s mouth thereby presenting an explicit demonstration of the physicality of the voice.

Scanner, *Let the Voice In* (2007-2010), audio

Scanner (Robin Rimbaud) is a British electronic musician.

Let the Voice In is a 5m32s mix of material from a 2007 commission for an event at Paradiso Amsterdam celebrating Burroughs. The recording is a complex mix of musical rhythms, ambient swells and vocal manipulations of Burroughs’ voice.

Laureana, Toledo *Thoughts* (2010), video, and *Panchito* (2010), audio

Toledo is a Mexican artist who uses photography, drawing, video, sound and sculpture.

Thoughts was a silent video of texts variably in English and Spanish appearing on an otherwise blank grey screen. Text examples included: “What we don’t see. What lies

beneath the surface.” – “We all carry our own soundtrack” – “Pienso que estoy muy cómoda debajo del agua, así que suelto todo el aire y salgo a la superficie”²² – “Silently. Without direction” – “Scared to be caught without an idea” – “Él nunca hubiera aceptado algo así”²³ – “It’s so absurd”.

Panchito was a 0m24s recording (0m12s looped) of children saying “hola” (Spanish for hello) loudly and repeatedly.

Terre Thaemlitz, *Taking Stock in Our Pride* (1998), audio, and *Soul Killer (Remote Control Mix)* (1997), audio

Thaemlitz is a US-born musician based in Japan whose work is based on themes of identity politics.

Taking Stock in Our Pride is a 2m46s track originally released on the 1999 Thaemlitz album *Love For Sale*. It is a carefully constructed edit of media recordings made at the San Francisco Pride Parade “brought to you by Bud Light”. The majority of the samples are media recordings either mentioning the various sponsors of the parade; mentions of money, commerce or cost, or referring to specific brand names that they can see – “that convertible you just saw there was a Pontiac convertible”.

Soul Killer (Remote Control Mix) is an 8m20s remix of Bill Laswell and William Burroughs’ track *Soul Killer* from the 1989 Material album *Seven Souls*. The Thaemlitz mix was originally released on the 1997 re-release of the album.

Thomson & Craighead, *Ghosts*, (2010), installation

Thomson & Craighead are British artists Jon Thomson and Alison Craighead who make art with audiovisual and Internet technology.

Ghosts was a wallpapered section of the gallery wall through which visitors could hear (with a supplied stethoscope) recordings of scanned mobile telephone conversations recorded by the artists.

Ultra-red, *DARE II (CLEAN CUT) edit* (2010), audio

Ultra-red are a sound art collective based in both the US and Europe.

DARE II (CLEAN CUT) edit is a Burroughsian cut-up tape made from audio recordings made by Ultra-red members during their participation in the operation and organisation of Los Angeles’ first syringe exchange programme, Clean Needles Now.

²² Trans: “I think I’m very comfortable underwater, so free all the air and go to the surface”

²³ Trans: “He would never have accepted something like that.”

The particular recordings used were of artist, and programme founder, Reneé Edgington who received a citation for drug paraphernalia possession by the Los Angeles Police Department.

Simon Reuben White, *Untitled* (2010), installation

White is a British curator, artist and musician and co-founder of London's alternative, artist-run Elevator Gallery.

At the heart of *Untitled* are a number of found audiocassette tapes recorded by Terry Patterson, an individual unknown to White. The tapes are monologues of Terry, with occasional edits of music, and appear to have been recorded as letters to send to Terry's mother in the UK (Terry appears to be an expat living in Thailand). In the tapes Terry tells his mother about his life, business projects (involving supplying office furniture) and his bride. The installation is comprised of the tapes, a tape recorder, painted red, with headphones for the visitor to listen to them on, arranged on a small red table.

The exhibition also the Burroughs experiments *Her Primrose Laundry* and *WSB and IS Stereo Experiment* analysed in Chapter Three.

4.3.5 The Exhibition

Two factors should be made evident in how visitors arrived at the exhibition. The first factor is that there is no window or visible component of the exhibition on view prior to entering the gallery. The visitor is presented with the theme of the exhibition: *Dead Fingers Talk: the Tape Experiments of William S. Burroughs*, yet beyond that the only immediately available text or description is a brief text found with a map of the exhibits inside the door when the visitor enters. No significant background to Burroughs' tape experiments is given, nor are any of the works in the exhibition explained. This approach could be regarded as contrary to an educational emphasis on curation and contrary to a historical emphasis as suggested in the first chapter of this thesis. The lack of contextualising wall text, or detailed handout, was intentional in order not to begin the experience of the exhibition as much as possible with words and therefore to resist define the exhibition prior to investigation: the exhibition as illustration of text.

The visitor is first confronted with Plastique Fantastique's mobile hanging from the ceiling directly in front of the entrance. Work placed at the entrance of an exhibition operates as the gateway to the project, a mediator between the public, the social environment of the street and the site of artistic exchange. As such the work has to be carefully selected from amongst the submissions to introduce the audience to the field of play. The selection is particularly relevant in lieu of a contextualising wall text, or detailed handout. The Plastique Fantastique proposition fulfils many of the concerns and themes presented in the previous chapter and does so using an extraordinary breadth of media and sensorial stimuli.²⁴ The intended effect therefore is to immediately present the contradiction that the "tape experiments" of the title are not confined by media or specific technologies. The work itself included lit candles, sculpted Plasticine models and glitter, creating a floating series of platforms from the top of which a strange muffled piece of electronic music plays, including eerie screeches and meows:



Plastique Fantastique *Plastique Fantastique Yage-Cat-Demon-Shrine* (2010)

²⁴ It should be noted that I have, since this exhibition and partly in response to my opinion of the success of this work, been working with Plastique Fantastique on a number of other projects. I mention this to ensure openness in terms of any bias in this review of the exhibition.

The roughness of the Plasticine creatures, and the accessibly crude decorative aesthetic of the glitter encapsulated the DIY principles of Burroughs' project with sound. The noises from the speaker granted an air of obfuscated messages akin to the Raudive tapes, and yet the piece as a whole was resolutely contemporary. Its playfulness – granted by the models, the decorative or playful characteristic of mobiles and the bouncy percussion and animal voice manipulations of the sound element of the piece – was combined with as arcane seriousness: the symbol of a vomiting or ingesting creature, the pop-voodoo, pop-occult, pulp fiction associations of feathers and candles.

The main gallery room also contained a number of other works that have a major impact on the *Plastique Fantastique* installation due to containing audible components. Technically the most constant impact is from Lawrence English's four shoebox tape machines containing looped tape cassettes playing silences edited from recordings of Burroughs voice, although relatively silent in practice. Other than this Alex Baker and Kit Poulson's sounding buckets were the most audible components of the space and, when at their height, significantly drowned out almost all other present sounds. The remaining works by Iacono, Toledo, Piringer and o.blaat were silent or on headphones.

Some of these works responded to the request (in accordance with the supplied brief) in ways that can be described in terms of the articulated emphases of sound in Chapter One as a phenomenon not just perceivable via the ear. The responses of the invited practitioners generally favoured sounding materials however many had a more complex relationship to sound than merely being an audible phenomenon.

On an explicit level, Iacono supplied two recordings neither of which had audio. One of Toledo's works, *Thoughts*, likewise was video only. Less explicitly Thomson & Craighead's installation *Ghosts* required the self-confidence and initiative of the visitor to activate it by donning the stethoscope and listening at the area of the gallery wall that had been wallpapered.



Thomson & Craighead *Ghosts* (2010)

The reaction of audiences to some of the works also brings interesting insights with regard to the multi-sensory emphases for sound. Although Baker & Poulson's *Conversation* regularly produced sounding elements, for some visitors to the exhibition these elements became dissociated from the work itself. Online bloggers Helen Wilson and Mark Raison both identified the buckets with no reference to their sound: "The next thing you will notice are two black buckets which are filled with water and sat in the middle of the floor" and "two black buckets of water" respectively.



Installation shot with Baker & Poulson's *Conversation* (2010) in the foreground

By contrast English's *In Absentia*, ultimately looped recordings of silence, consistently drew visitors up to the speakers of the tape machines to listen. This provides a crucial insight into the potential behaviour of visitors and how they might respond to the visual indicators of sound as a product of technology as opposed to the presence of sound itself. It could be suggested that, in terms of this example, visitors also listen with their eyes.



Lawrence English *In Absentia* (2010)

Another example worth mentioning in this regard is association by proximity. Toledo's *Thoughts* (a soundless video on a monitor) was installed in the vicinity of Piringer's *Sorted Speech 1* (an audio-only recording on headphones). Many visitors would engage with the piece as one experience, donning the headphones and watching the video simultaneously and, in many cases, when they had finished, choosing to stop their engagement with both at the same time.



A visitor engages simultaneously with *Thoughts* and *Sorted Speech 1*

The reactions to *Conversation*, *In Absentia*, *Thoughts* and *Sorted Speech 1* could be interpreted via an interesting interplay of affordances. On the one hand the visitor may not recognise the buckets as an implicitly sounding object and thus doesn't engage in a meaning-making process that involves their sound whilst, at the same time, behaves in the opposite manner to the "silences" on the tape machines. Likewise in an environment (such as the 21st Century) in which the majority of video is audiovisual (as revealed by the

absence of the word audio in the word video, yet the implication that it is there) the need for audible stimuli to accompany the soundless video of *Thoughts* is provided by the convenient proximity of a pair of headphones, despite the two pieces containing entirely unrelated and unsynchronised material. As visitors predominantly stopped engaging with the two works simultaneously (removed the headphones and stopping watching the video at the same time) the assumption can be made that the works continued to be engaged with together whether or not a visitor had noticed that the two works were in fact unconnected. The result of this arbitrary association is comparable to the Raudive project that, like *Thoughts* and *Sorted Speech 1*, appears to stimulate some sort of meaning-making process despite lacking any intrinsic coherence.

The examples given above also raise the notion that hallucination is bound up within the listening process. The active avoidance of an, occasionally fierce, sonic presence in *Conversation* alongside the obsessive focus on the comparative silence of *In Absentia* can be taken as examples of the active hallucination of absence and presence in the audible environment. Likewise the perceived congruity between *Thoughts* and *Sorted Speech 1* can also be suggested as examples of a sort of subjective cognitive hallucination.

The exhibition delivered a project that adhered to the decentralised notion of authorship as described in Chapter Two (firstly in reference to the Gysin image from *The Ticket That Exploded* announcing that Burroughs is not an exclusive source of such experimentation; and secondly as a call to arms for other to undertake experiments for themselves). It did so by announcing, in its title, that these were the tape experiments of William S. Burroughs, whilst presenting a small sample of Burroughs' experiments themselves as an overwhelming minority. Additionally by embracing the potential haemorrhaging of sound itself from one work to another, the autonomy of the individual works in a group exhibition helped to contribute to this decentralised authorship. In this respect the exhibition adhered to a Burroughsian curatorial methodology articulated through Chapters Two and Three.

Coming from the front gallery into the back passes through a corridor installed with directional speakers that broadcast Ultra-red's *DARE II (CLEAN CUT) edit*. In the first of the back rooms was a strip of wallpaper, next to which hangs a pair of stethoscopes, both part of Thomson & Craighead's *Ghosts*.

All the while visitors will be aware of sounds emanating from the penultimate space. Here could be found The Human Separation's record player attached to headphones offering a number of compact discs of recordings of Burroughs to play as if

they were vinyl records and a monitor with the second of Riccardo Iacono's silent video works. Alongside these was and a show-reel-style monitor playing an assortment of video and audio work through large studio monitor speakers.

The final room is entered via a curtain partition that resembles a private, technical space in which a single spotlight illuminates the tape machine and speakers of Aki Onda's *First Thought Best Thought* and its cut-up compilation of sounds recorded in Morocco in the 1980s whilst on a pilgrimage after Burroughs, Gysin and Paul Bowles.



Aki Onda *First Thought Best Thought* (2010)

The effect of the exhibition as a whole could be viewed as a cacophony of ideas and materials. The stability of sound-based domains of practice such as poetry, music or environmental recording, are never allowed to stabilise themselves for too long before switching into a different time, place or mode of delivery. Such a disharmony of materials and domains of interaction could be understood as a replication of a studio environment at its busiest, a curation of production rather than products.

As representative of the switching formats and fields of engagement that take place during a surfing of the World Wide Web, the exhibition succeeds in replicating the aesthetic of the dominant field of exchange in what has hitherto been the dominant site of exchange of contemporary art. Some of the works of course contained implicit

interaction: Simon Reuben White's tape machine in *Untitled* requiring visitors to select, insert and play one of a collection of audio cassette tapes; The Human Separation's record/compact disc player in *Classic Verbatim*, likewise requiring visitors to select and play one of an offered stack of compact discs; Thompson & Craighead's wall stethoscope in *Ghosts*, requiring visitors to listen at a wall for recorded telephone conversations; and yet others suggest a necessity of action during their engagement (that is to say not the action of merely donning a pair of headphones): Lawrence English's tapes of silence that invite close listening to individual speakers and movement between these, Ultra-red's directional set up of concealed speakers that catch the listener as they pass by and on occasion cause them to retrace their steps and listen more closely, and Aki Onda's installation that draws the visitor into the dark room behind the curtain.

The last of these installations, Onda's *First Thought Best Thought* elicited a particular response from one visitor worth detailing in that it demonstrated some interesting insights through a particular visitor response. Onda's submission was composed of recordings taken by Onda in a trip to Morocco in the 1980s. The submission required that the work exist in a darkened space, playing through an old tape machine (via a hidden CD player wired into the machine). The recordings were cut-ups of Moroccan street noise.

The construction of a separate, darkened space within the gallery and in accordance with Onda's wishes had to take into account a number of major restrictive factors. The space was eventually built as, what would become, the final space in the gallery that a visitor would come to. Additionally, in order to reach the space, a visitor would have to walk through a black curtain. As an exhibition containing a number of new media works requiring electrical equipment, it could be assumed that the curtain might be concealing equipment rather than further exhibition space.

Whilst it may be assumed that the sounds emanating from behind the curtain might guide visitors into the space, the street noises and Moroccan music may also be assumed, in passing, to be coming from the behind the gallery through the gallery window adjacent to the curtain. As Bethnal Green contains a large Islamic population, the Western ear might easily make the assumption that the brief episodes of music amidst the noise of a busy street may be emanating from elsewhere.

During the exhibition's run, it became evident that a small but significant number of visitors appeared reluctant to enter this space unless prompted.

4.3.5.1 *First Thought Best Thought*

During the exhibition's run a young boy of about three or four years of age visits with his father and slips, on his own, behind the curtain of Onda's installation *First Thought Best Thought*. Behind this curtain the boy is greeted with a tape machine playing a collage of recordings from Morocco; perhaps he was drawn in by the sounds, or perhaps by the curtain itself. The machine is likely to be unfamiliar to him; it may even have been built before his father was born. The boy, to the embarrassment of his father, also repeatedly turned Onda's work off.

The boy moves back and forth through the curtain, spending variable times behind and in front of it. He presses the buttons and throws the switches on the machine, some of which turn the sounds off and on again. He lets his father know that the space is a train, later it is a TARDIS, then a train again. He does not try to defend this assertion, it is a mystical, paranormal and paranoid assertion built from an investigation of a space of sounds. The meaning of the interaction is not discussed.

Like the reactions to Baker & Poulson's *Conversation* and English's *In Absentia*, and in the case of the young boy, it could be suggested that it was the trappings of the work, not its sounding components, which had become the most convincing tools of engagement.

At first one might assume that it is the curtain and the space that he is reacting to, that the sound is of little consequence. However is it perhaps significant that the sound plays noises of the past and of far away lands? The child's manipulation of the controls cuts this world abruptly off and on, transporting his location back and forth in time and space. And even his fantasy is an unstable, shifting narrative from the transportation in space of a train, and then the space-time travel of the TARDIS. The child is renaming "This is a train!" using the resources of the aural to restage the physical environment.

The boy is a fugitive of identities crossing back and forth, intercutting himself with his environment, switching between play and performance. He is using the sounds as environmental cues to liberate his interactions, him and his environment, physical and

metaphysical, as a montage of fragments. The perpetuation of a coherent narrative is not essential for his investigation of the work; in fact it would limit it. So he placed his play in a perpetual revolution of engagement with the sounds and the spaces they evoke.

The silences of the tape mark the contextualisation of his performance, the point at which he is forced to articulate the experience to his father. The boy is not confronted by the installation, but investigates it. He uses the tape machine to restage his niche of relations as travel and science fiction narratives.

The nature of Onda's work is inherently unstable and playful in the way he collages and cuts between spaces. Additionally "his practice is located in an ambiguous site informed by music, literature, performative art, phonology, autobiography and sensory ethnography" (David Toop via email 13th September 2013). As such his installation provided a multitude of resources for engagement, coupled with the tactile presence of the curtain, and the added instability of author and source through the interference of other works in the exhibition.

As a microcosm of the exhibition *First Thought Best Thought* provided an engagement with the meaning-making process that was not bound by the preconditions of a consistent set of principles defined by a pre-existing entity. Its inherent instability was also destabilised by the instability of its surroundings. In this example it is the child who determines the nature of the materials with which they engage as well as how they engage with them. Like Burroughs articulating his liberation through routines, the child announces the changes as indicators of an ideal liberation, free to collapse the boundaries of his own fictions as if constructing a cut-up text of his own experiences and fantasies.

Conclusion

When, in 1976, COUM Transmissions became Throbbing Gristle, Peter Christopherson is quoted in Simon Ford's *Wreckers of Civilisation* as remarking that the move from the gallery into music was due to a feeling that:

...the art establishment was a waste of time. [That] the only point of making a creative work is if you are able to share your own vision of the world with someone to whom that knowledge may have an effect, not a shock effect necessarily, but [to] help them see the world more vividly or in a different light. [Our work] was meaningless if we were not making a statement to people of our

own age, people whose lives might actually be affected by what we were doing, rather than the art establishment, who were not really interested.

Peter Christopherson in Ford 1999:6.27

Christopherson envisages this process to be more approachable in the environment of music as an environment that is both less bound by the formal restrictions of the art establishment and also the domain of youth.

Burroughs' failure to "apply or develop theory properly [that makes his project] so interesting" (Harris 2003:38) can perhaps be compared to Christopherson's assessment of "the art establishment" and my acknowledgement that the actions of the child were perhaps the most valuable in terms of articulating the curatorial strategy. A project driven by experimentation, by an endeavour to replicate a mode of perpetual production and by an effort to resist what Burroughs referred to as the cycle of conditioned action, may, as this project demonstrates, be most successful in the more liberated play of children. Alternatively the implication could be that the project presents a strategy that aims to elicit similar responses in adults.

I have demonstrated via Deutsch (2009) and Raudive (1971) how much our psychological state and cultural niche colour the sounds of our environment and the need, therefore, to approach meaning-making in audial art as an open and on-going process. Burroughs' activities with sound seem both conceptually and practically driven towards an investigation into meaning and effect apposite to such a conceptualisation of sound in the arts.

When I approached the participants for their involvement in the exhibition, the openness of my request for material inspired by the curatorial strategy helped provide an extraordinary range of artistic responses. These responses are fascinating not by their mutual technologies, sources or motivations, but because of how they resisted common technologies, sources and motivations. The overlapping sounds and objects shifted between abstracted and representational domains of reproduction. They did not prioritise a discourse, but hinted at multiple motives and investigations, occasionally creating moments in which sounds from outside the environment of production could be folded into the experience of the work. In this way the project presented a Burroughsian approach to the exhibition making process, collapsing boundaries between the physical and the metaphysical within an exhibition narrative.

5 Conclusion

“Don’t just play your side of the game, play both sides.”

Marcel Duchamp advising John Cage on chess (Roth 1998:74)

Amongst the collection of tape experiments donated to the British Library by Barry Miles, are two blank tapes marked “Blank. Not dubbed.”¹ The two blank tapes, though not dubbed, are nevertheless categorised under Burroughs in the sound archive. Such blank tapes are exceedingly rare in the sound archive, being, as they are, objects of questionable historical value rather than a record of sounds.

Absence and loss are ever present through Burroughs’ experiments. I find it as a result of Burroughs’ methodology and random events both intentional and accidental. Half finished sentences, such as the ‘Intro’ to ‘Working with the Popular Forces’ described in Chapter Three, unknown voices, cropped words and syllables, and, as in the description of the tape catalogued at C1156/15, entitled ‘William’s training program’, “fragments [and] faint half-erased [...] readings”. The blank tapes have not even been dubbed but await recording.

In my analysis of the close of *The Ticket That Exploded*, in which, as Lydenberg describes, Burroughs and his characters disappear into silence, I described how this silence became first a canvas for Gysin’s “silence to say goodbye” calligraphic gestures and then the didactic proposition that, through its form, heralds new projects. To read meaning into the arbitrary collection of tapes that survive, these final, blank, tapes resonate with meaning: a meaning of Burroughs’ departure, but also of collaboration and future production.

As such the blank tapes imply activation. They signify potentials, awaiting a visitor engaged with their own domain of experimentation to disrupt conditioned action. They are there as an invitation to try the experiments for yourself, “cut-ups are for everyone, anybody can make cut-ups.” (Burroughs 1979:31). Archived on an equal footing alongside Burroughs’ other materials, the blank tapes inadvertently present an amusing ideal of the Burroughs project: an indication of a future moment of activation in which the project takes place. Such a suggestion demands a response, and so, in the preceding chapters, I have provided mine: a curatorial project that begins with a blank recording.

¹ Catalogued at C1156/21 and C1156/24

Through this research I sought to develop and articulate a curatorial strategy and to realise that strategy as a public project. My motivation for this work was to expand the research on curatorial strategies in contemporary art with an emphasis on sound-oriented projects. Through application of ecological approaches to cognition I have privileged the exhibition visitor as the focus of the process of meaning-making in exhibitions, and how this process might be understood by a curator. I have examined Burroughs' project in the '60s and early '70s in the theoretical framework of curatorial strategy in sound-oriented practices. Through this I have articulated a domain of meaning-making focused on visitor interactions, replacing Burroughs at the site of artistic exchange with the visitor who processes the world and Burroughs in it.

I have presented the development and presentation of curatorial strategy in the way I have because such articulation and analysis of curatorial strategies matter. They provided insights for artists and visitors into how curators organise art and the environment within which it is framed. Exhibitions contextualise cultural production in ways that is often beyond the reach of artists whose work is being exhibited. As curators have become more independent of formal systems of presentation, the strategies they apply are therefore of increasing relevance to how art is perceived. In response to this, my thesis describes all stages of in the development and delivery of a thorough curatorial strategy.

In 'Notes on Burroughs', Marshall McLuhan's 1964 article in *The Nation*, McLuhan summarised *Naked Lunch* as follows:

The central theme of *Naked Lunch* is the strategy of bypassing the new electric environment by becoming an environment oneself. The moment one achieves this environmental state all things and people are submitted to you to be processed. Whether a man takes the road of junk or the road of art, the entire world must submit to his processing. The world becomes his "content." He programs the sensory order.

McLuhan 1964:1

Through my analysis of Burroughs' project and how it absorbed his understanding of Cubism, Korzybski, and Hubbard, his collaborations with Gysin and his application of experimental techniques, I have described how Burroughs sought to, as McLuhan puts it, "process" the world. For Burroughs, the world is material for manipulation and reshuffling, nothing is safe or sacred. Through such a strategy Burroughs sought to reveal a potential space of liberation in which he could finally be free of addiction,

control and conditioned action. I have demonstrated how such an ideal Burroughsian Space can act as a motivation for experimental practices and reveal new permutations, interpretations and projects.

I have undertaken and presented detailed, original examinations of relevant selections of Burroughs' tape experiments. This work has revealed a high level of specificity for the audial materials he incorporated into his experiments. On the one hand Burroughs' attention to detail is surprising as these experiments were not meant as artistic propositions. On the other hand it is perhaps testament to Burroughs' belief in his project, and the supernatural motivations behind this belief. The data and insights I have uncovered in these complex, inconsistent and unpredictable experiments demonstrate the potential for further investigative work in this field.

My research, via Burroughs, has presented a context for practices that resist purification in creative discipline, motivation and delivery. I have shown how Burroughs' project might be employed as a strategy for the proliferation of new and complex relationships between artistic practices and a more open, ecological understanding of how visitors interact with contemporary art.

I personally find much of Burroughs' approach to experimental practice compelling and liberating. I also see the difficulties others find in his approach to meaning and the esoteric nature of some of his source material. However as a gallerist and curator I find his approach bears striking similarities with the experimental strategies and methodologies that artists frequently undertake in their studios.

Artistic practice allows a different type of rigor to that which is demanded of academia and, in many cases, of formal curatorial approaches. As this thesis demonstrates, curatorial strategies developed through the articulation of experimental practices may serve artists' intentions just as well or better than traditional approaches. Through doing so in terms of Burroughs' project I have contributed to the collaborative perpetuation that Burroughs explicitly called for in the appendices to *The Ticket That Exploded*.

The research presented here highlights the range of material implicit in the rigorous formulation of a curatorial strategy. This work specifies a strategy developed from Burroughs' experiments, using this as the guiding practice. The limitations of such a focused field merely demonstrate the breadth of available possibilities for contemporary curatorial strategies and of the consequences of the curator-as-practitioner paradigm.

Within the curator-as-practitioner paradigm there is also the artist-as-curator. I did not approach this side of curatorial strategy, as it was not applicable to my strategy as presented. However the methodological implications of such a practice are important to recognise as the artist-as-curator brings with it further ethical and political factors. An artist who places his or her own work within a curatorial proposition might, for example, need to further articulate the relationship between their role as artist and as curator. Had I presented my own artwork within the exhibition then my thesis would have necessitated further examination of my status as curator.

In this thesis I sought to articulate a curatorial strategy for Burroughs' experiments with sound fundamental to Burroughs' own methodology and motivations. The tape experiments, as I have demonstrated, are intrinsically individual in their approach and motivations, and my curatorial strategy was formulated with that in mind. Alternative approaches could propose a wider contextualisation of activities with tape around the period under discussion, for example further comparison with works such as John Cage's algorithmic cut-and-splice tape work *Williams Mix* (1951-1953). There is a strong argument for basing a curatorial strategy on contextualising Burroughs' project with such practices, or indeed with other contemporaneous endeavours. The contextual background to what has been presented here has been intentionally limited in order to refrain from misrepresenting Burroughs' unique motivations for production as experimental, not-art propositions.

The nature of Burroughs' project demands this work be continued in collaboration or by new agencies. Indeed following *Dead Fingers Talk* new, collaborative forms of the exhibition have appeared. The first was as part of artist Andy Holden's festival of artists' music *Be Glad for the Song Has No End* (2010) at the Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridgeshire, under the heading *Dead Fingers Talking*.² On this occasion I provided an assortment of works from *Dead Fingers Talk* to play outside of scheduled performances as background interventions into the ambience of the festival. The second was *Dead Fingers Talk 2012: The Mayan Caper* (2012) at Galleri Box, Göteborg, in which a different assortment of works from the exhibition was randomly mixed with recordings solicited from a new range of practitioners who had been asked only to make sound recordings of exhibition spaces.

² A wonderful misreading of *Dead Fingers Talk* that we thereafter kept.

Other obvious implications of this research would be to take a Burroughsian curatorial strategy out of the gallery context and present projects that interact with a range of spaces and exhibition contexts:

...playback in the street will show the influence of your sound track in operation [...] waft your message right into a worthy ear [...] carry my message all over london [...] working with street playback you will see your playback find the appropriate context [...] the physiological liberation achieved as word lines of controlled association are cut will make you more efficient at reaching your objectives...

Burroughs 1967:208

Such future projects would be pertinent to the work discussed in this thesis and appropriate for the nature of the source material.

At the centre of this thesis is the necessity for articulations of curatorial strategy. The implications of this will be to provide a precedent for the proliferation of curatorial openness in relation to exhibition making. Such openness is invaluable whether for curators that undertake to work with complex creative contexts (such as that found in the tape experiments of Burroughs), or who approach propositions in the broader domain of sound-oriented work or, indeed, for those operating in the general and expanding field of contemporary art practice.

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